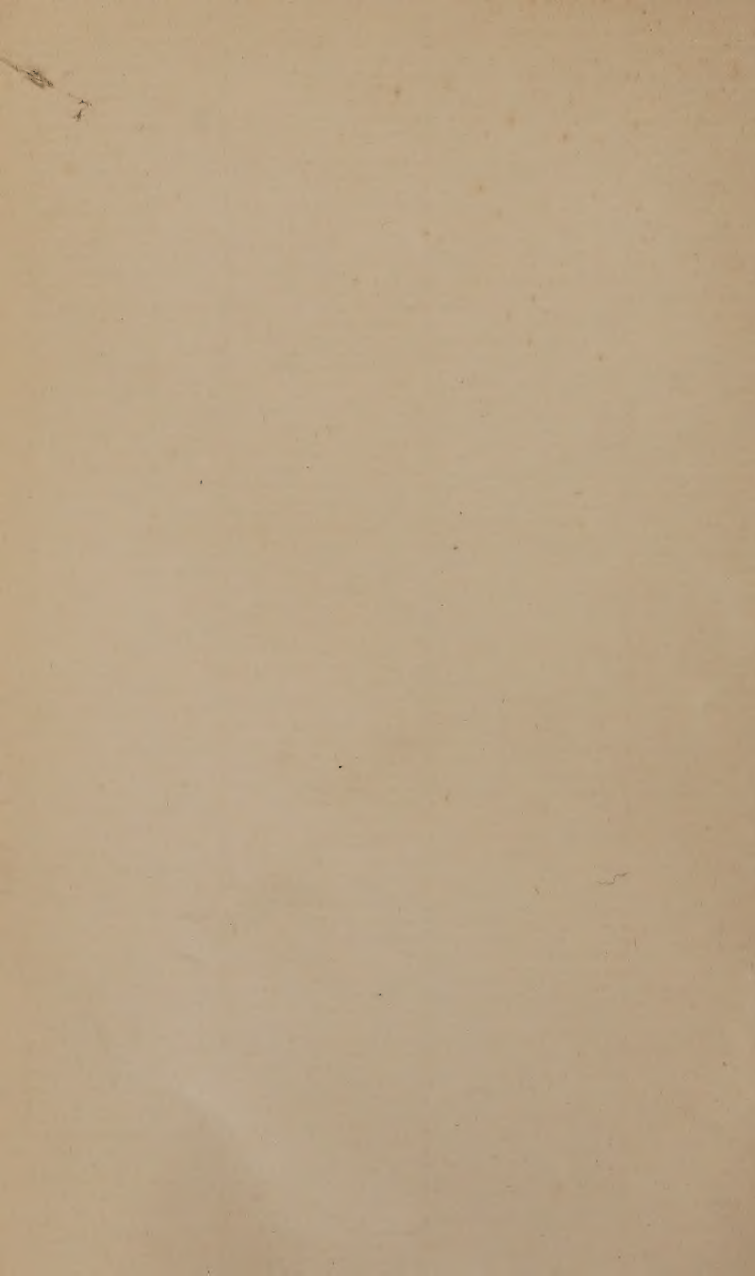




THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

"An honest tale speeds best, being plainly told."

—Shakespeare.

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“A Manse Rose.”

“Glenathole.”

Etc.

Etc.

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

BY

CYRIL GREY

*"No more can you distinguish of a man
Than of his outward show; which, God he knows,
Seldom or never jumpeth with the heart."*

—Shakespeare.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I.—Seed that Bore a Harvest, - - -	7
II.—A Highland Laddie, - - -	16
III.—Kitty's Confessions, - - -	24
IV.—Setting of a Great Hope, - - -	34
V.—Nabal, - - -	43
VI.—Love or Fame? - - -	51
VII.—Taking Stock, - - -	57
VIII.—A Thorn in the Flesh, - - -	65
IX.—Breaking the Ice, - - -	73
X.—“The Best-laid Schemes o' Mice an' Men,”	80
XI.—Disowned, - - -	88
XII.—A Meeting, - - -	98
XIII.—“The Advertiser,” - - -	106
XIV.—A Windfall, - - -	114
XV.—Widening Horizons, - - -	123
XVI.—Brothers, - - -	132
XVII.—Colin Munro's Venture, - - -	138
XVIII.—The Bird and the Snare, - - -	146
XIX.—The Storm, - - -	156
XX.—Shipwreck, - - -	164
XXI.—Farewell to Fortune, - - -	173

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXII.—The Haven of Home, - - -	179
XXIII.—The Unanswered Summons, - - -	190
XXIV.—Transplanting, - - -	200
XXV.—The Revelations of Adversity, - - -	210
XXVI.—A Friend at Court, - - -	220
XXVII.—Interrupted Renovations, - - -	228
XXVIII.—Friendship on Trial, - - -	236
XXIX.—The Laird and his Bride, - - -	247
XXX.—Brought Low, - - -	257
XXXI.—The Recall, - - -	270
XXXII.—A Cleaning and a Courtship, - - -	276
XXXIII.—Reunion, - - -	283
XXXIV.—Diplomacy Rewarded, - - -	291
XXXV.—Valedictory, - - -	300

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE.



CHAPTER I.

SEED THAT BORE A HARVEST.

OVER the ridge of a rugged hill the moon was rising in golden splendour, tinging the new fallen snow that enveloped the landscape in one vast mantle of dazzling white. Bare, treeless hills were those that lifted their heads one above another and girt like mighty ramparts the strath beneath; but they had a stern grandeur of their own that won many an artist's admiration. Down their deep seamed sides the winter torrents dashed and brawled on their way to the swift, winding river that threaded the plain, its waters glittering in the sheen of the moonlight. As the radiance brightened, the beauty of the scene disclosed itself. Pine woods mantled the lower slopes, their dark shadows the only contrast to the uniform whiteness; while at long intervals the lights from cottage windows twinkled feebly, marking the spots where a few hardy farmers "forced a churlish soil for scanty bread."

The storm of yesterday had abated, and not yet had the mountain passes become blocked with snowdrifts, else those two figures that were slowly

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

descending one of the hills had not been there. One of them was a tall youth of muscular build and broad shoulders draped in a long coat, who trudged on through the snow like one well accustomed to such pedestrian exercise. The other was a boy, who seemed equally at his ease as he strode beside his companion, not whistling, as he would have done had he been alone, but observing a respectful silence, till, as they reached a place where the snow had accumulated to an unusual height, the tall man, brought to a stand for the moment, said:

"Now, Colin, how do you get to school when the snow is as deep as this?"

"Go through it, sir," was the prompt reply, uttered with a smile that evoked one from his companion, who turned upon him a look of amused incredulity as he rejoined:

"Then you're not afraid of difficulties?"

"Just whiles," was the honest answer.

"And what difficulties do you fear?" pursued his questioner.

"What I'm learnin' at the schule."

"Are you fond of your books?"

"Some o' them."

"Are you a good scholar?"

"I widna like to say, sir, but the maister says I may dae weel yet, if I'm perseverin'."

"And what would you like to be, Colin, when you're a man?"

"My faither an' mither wad like me to be a meenister."

"But what would you like to be yourself?"

"I think I wad like to be that, if I hae the brains for't, an' if . . ."

"If what?"

SEED THAT BORE A HARVEST

"Weel, sir, it taks a heip o' siller to gang to college an' get a' the learnin' ye need afore ye can be a meenister, an' I wadna hae my faither an' mither stervin' themsels for me."

"How many are there of you at home?"

"There's Murdo and Malcolm and Sheila."

Here a pause ensued which lasted for some minutes, till, emerging from the drift, Colin's companion asked:

"Did you understand what I was speaking about at the meeting to-night?"

"Ay, every word o't," was the ready answer, "far better than Maister Macgregor's sermons."

A smile broke over the young man's face as he proceeded:

"Do you think you'll remember what I said about the two great armies, when I go away from Avenmore?"

"Ay, will I," said the boy with an emphasis that terminated with a break in his voice as he added: "But we're a' unco vexed that ye're gaun awa' to the King's army."

"Why, Colin?" queried his companion. "Don't you think it's our duty to defend our King and country against enemies?"

"I dinna doot it, sir, but we'll a' miss ye here."

"It's kind to say that, Colin: we like to think our friends miss us when we're away; but we must put duty first, for God requires it of us, if we look at it aright. As I was saying to-night, we must all take our place in one or other of the two armies—God's or—the Devil's; and we must fight just as truly in the ordinary duties of life as in the King's army, where I am going. Do you know who is the greatest hero, Colin?"

"Him that conquers the biggest faes."

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

"No, my boy; many that have conquered great and powerful enemies and been praised by a whole nation for their bravery have not been heroes. The true hero is the man who has learnt to conquer himself. 'Greater is he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.' You know where to find those words, Colin?"

"Ay, sir, in the Proverbs. My faither was readin' them the ither nicht."

"Well, keep them in mind, my boy, all your life, for you'll often have need of them. Now I'll say good night to you, for I see the Castle lights yonder. Remember the two armies."

They had reached the outskirts of a wood, through which a long avenue led to the building indicated, and the two travellers parted, the one to his ancestral home, the other to the thatched cottage on the hill.

But though he little dreamt it, Colin Munro's destiny was decided by that conversation; for, as he sat beside his widowed mother that night before a blazing fire in a spacious apartment that had witnessed many a stirring scene in days of yore, when those whose portraits graced its walls were bearing their part in events that made national history, the young man, whose parting words still rang in the boy's ears, related the talk they had had.

Lady Avenmore listened with lively interest, for she had often visited the Munros, and knew their history well; but her interest arose chiefly from the intense satisfaction she had always derived from her son's devotion to the welfare of their tenantry, to whom he had endeared himself as no previous scion of that house had ever done. He was her only son and the heir to an ancient

SEED THAT BORE A HARVEST

patrimony, and all a mother's fondest hopes and proudest aspirations centred in him. Already she had seen those hopes realised in his blameless life and lofty aims, and now anticipated an old age spent in the shelter of his love, and in contemplation of a life made beautiful by divine inspiration and rewarded by the attachment of all who owed a feudal allegiance to their house.

"He'll make his mark, that laddie," said Lord Avenmore. "There's a brightness and frankness about him that pleases me. Should he be of the same mind, mother, ten years hence, he must go to college. Of course, with all the will in the world, his parents cannot carry him through a college and divinity course, but I'll do that, if God spares me, and I hope to see him filling one of the first pulpits in the land."

He did not notice the pallor on that beautiful face opposite him as he uttered with solemn earnestness those words: "If God spares me"; nor the momentary quiver on her lips as her eye rested on his young, beardless countenance, cast in a mould so like her own. Nor did her words betray the emotion stirred within her, as she quietly said:

"It will give me pleasure too, Angus, for I think him a promising boy and one likely to be a credit to his parents, whom I admire for their honesty and thrift and their noble spirit of independence. They are an example to many who, with far less hardships, are ever complaining."

Silence ensued, and mother and son sat gazing into the fire. It was broken by the latter, who, turning to the countess, said in tones of genuine feeling:

"Mother, all the congratulations I received

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

when I came of age lately have not touched me so much as the words spoken to me at my meetings by both old and young. When some of those big, rough farmers gripped my hand and wished me God's blessing, I confess I almost played the baby. Their concern that I would come back from the war and live among them, as my forebears had done, was so hearty, that it was no easy work to master my feelings. I never felt it so hard to say goodbye."

He stopped abruptly, and the moisture in his eyes was revealed by the firelight.

But the tears that could no longer be forced back to their fountain fell down Lady Avenmore's cheek. What the impending parting cost her she had never betrayed to the son of her love, though it seemed as though he were taking her very life away with him; but, brave woman as she was, she spoke no word that could blunt his sense of honour or make it harder for him to quit the home he loved.

"We will all miss you, Angus, she calmly said; "but let us hope the war will end sooner than we think possible now, and then there will be greater rejoicings than at your coming of age."

"God grant it, mother!" was the fervent ejaculation. "I have no deeper desire than to live among my ain folk and do my duty by them."

"Must you join your regiment soon?" inquired the countess.

"I may be called any day," he answered. "And now I almost wish I were away. I hate good-byes."

"Alas, Angus, life is made up of them. 'There is no union here of hearts, else Heaven were Heaven to no end!'"

SEED THAT BORE A HARVEST.

There was another pause of silence, during which the widowed mother's thoughts had travelled through the varied experiences of many troubled years, and scenes associated with many who had left this world enacted themselves once more to her mental vision.

"Now, mother," the young earl presently said, "I want to have your assurance once more that I go with your full approval, and that you would not have me do otherwise."

"Yes, Angus," came the ready response: "I would never have it said of a son of our house that when his country needed his arm, he refused to lift it in its defence."

"Spoken like my own noble mother!" cried the young soldier, "I knew you would say that. As for me, I never hesitated one moment after my cousin Roderick said he was going. I am only sorry he should have taken precedence of me in that resolve."

"Roderick is your senior by six years, so you may claim equal patriotism with his; and I doubt not you will prove as faithful to your duty as he. Your father would have been proud of you, Angus."

Again the fugitive tears wet the widow's cheeks, and her voice quivered.

"And I trust you will be proud of me too, mother."

As he spoke the words, Lord Avenmore left his chair, seated himself on the arm of his mother's, and held her close in an embrace that needed no other expression.

Had any artist been witness of that scene, he would have wished to reproduce it on canvas.

That indefinable air of distinction, not always

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

conferred by noble birth, was conspicuous in the case of both mother and son. Lady Avenmore's figure was slight and scarcely above the average stature, and the dress of black velvet with its trimmings of ermine enhanced its gracefulness. Around her neck hung a magnificent locket of onyx and diamonds containing a coil of her husband's hair. A bracelet of the same materials clasped a shapely arm. But it was neither dress nor ornaments that attracted the eye. Almost faultless were the lineaments of that face, its contour of that rare oval, so beautiful in woman. The classic brow was shaded but not encroached on by the dark tresses that fell on either side of the head and strayed in ringlets about an exquisitely moulded neck. Arched by delicately pencilled eyebrows, and fringed by long lashes, shone dark lustrous eyes that looked with a steady yet gentle light from out of their shadowy depths. The finely curved lips wore a pensive expression, as if the language of sorrow had been all too familiar.

Yes, small wonder was it that amid the most brilliant assemblages or busiest crowds that beautiful face won glances of admiration, causing many to turn and gaze at it. But never did it look so lovely as when it greeted the wondering homage of the dwellers in lowly cottages, whose wants and welfare continued to enlist the sympathy and interest of this noble woman to the close of her beneficent life.

In a less refined cast of features her beauty was reproduced in her son, whose youthful countenance wore much the same expression as her own. Unlike her, however, he was tall and stately, with the proud, manly bearing that had distinguished many

SEED THAT BORE A HARVEST

a former chieftain of his clan. And yet there were a modesty and gentleness in that face which did not belie the heart it reflected, and which showed themselves still more in the acts of genuine charity and benevolence that made him loved and remembered by all who knew him long after death had cut short his brief career.

Ah, well for mother and son that neither saw the shadow gathering over them, and which was so soon to quench the sunshine of life for both. Mad indeed is the impulse that would snatch the book of Providence from the hands of its Author and read therein the secrets of destiny. How many of us, in a retrospect of our lives, could have faced its trials and tragedies had we foreseen them all? Merciful assuredly is the ordination that veiled the future from human ken.

That parting, now so near at hand, was to be the last between Lady Avenmore and her son, who never again returned to his ancestral home; and with him perished the hopes that had made life sweet for her. Bravely and faithfully she took up its burden again, hiding in her own heart the sorrow time could not heal. The gay world had no more power to charm her from her home among the mountains, woods, and lochs she loved—haunts of the eagle and the deer. There were others around her whose burdens she strove to lighten, whose lives she sought to ennoble and bless.

It is one life so prospered by her goodness that forms the subject of our story.

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

CHAPTER II.

A HIGHLAND LADDIE.

THE manse of Achnacairn was to be envied for its situation on the brow of a hill that overlooked a scene as captivating as ever delighted human eyes. Beneath its windows spread a loch between wooded hills, along whose sides were scattered the cottages of the crofters with their patches of cultivated soil. Interrupted by many a rocky promontory, the loch stretched out to the open sea, where a group of islets dotted its bosom which at sunset appeared like emeralds in a setting of gold. Above those hills some grand mountains reared their storm-riven summits, upon which the snow lay far into the year, feeding the torrents and cascades that coursed down their rugged sides.

At the further end of the loch, on a projecting strip of land, extended a line of white houses that constituted the village of Achnacairn.

A fair prospect indeed, and one that had never lost its charm since the day when, reaching the top of a steep ascent, the young minister, who now occupied the manse, had beheld it and fallen in love with it straight away. Forty years ago ! Could it be possible that that big portion of his earthly existence had elapsed since then ! Yes, there was no doubt about it: the inscription on the open Bible before him too surely attested it.

A HIGHLAND LADDIE

There it was, written in the clear, beautiful hand that had inscribed these words:

“To the Reverend Colin Munro, with sincere wishes for his future welfare—from Rachel Beatrice Gordon.

Avenmore, February 1st, 18—.”

His own whitening hair, once so tawny, as to procure the nickname of “Fiery,” bore equally convincing testimony to the fact that he was no longer young, that the spring and summer of life were over, and its autumn fast merging into winter. As he stands at the window gazing on that entrancing view, the past has thrown its spell over him and another scene rises up before him. Once more he is tramping through the snow at the heels of his young chief, and the words he spoke repeat themselves as if he had heard them but yesterday.

Lord Avenmore had not lived to fulfil his intention of providing the means for the education of his youthful protégé, but the wish he had expressed to his mother that memorable night had been faithfully carried out by her, though not so fully as she herself intended; for, poor though they were, Colin’s parents, with that honourable spirit of independence once so prominent a characteristic of the Scottish peasantry, had stipulated that they should bear their share in their son’s preparation for the ministry, while acknowledging with simple thankfulness the countess’s benevolence.

Nor were they or their patroness disappointed in the lad’s career. Step by step he had climbed to distinction both at St. Andrew’s ancient seat of learning and later at the Divinity Hall, which

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

he left with prospects brilliant enough to have jeopardized his own sense of inability to meet the requirements of the Christian ministry. Still more crucial tests awaited him in the success that attended his first public appearances as a preacher. Efforts to secure his services were speedily forthcoming, and both in Edinburgh and Glasgow he had occupied pulpits associated with some of the most honoured names in Scotland.

So sharp a transition from the obscurity of a Highland clachan to eminence and popularity might well have proved fatal to his better self, but the precepts he had imbibed and the lessons learnt in his boyhood's home, so faithfully exemplified in the lives of his parents amid their hardships and trials, had sunk deep into his heart and ripened into a beautiful consistency of character that transcended all his gifts.

Perhaps nothing proved this more thoroughly than his treatment of those parents. They were never allowed to think that their son's prosperity had affected the sentiments of filial affection toward them, or lessened his sense of indebtedness. With a delicacy of feeling that did him credit he arranged everything in his household on the occasions of their visits so that the disparity between the manse and their Highland home should be as little apparent as possible; and if ever the apprehension that he would be ashamed of his parents had entered their minds, it was for ever dispelled by his reception of them and his genuine anxiety to make them feel at ease in surroundings that could not but embarrass them despite his best efforts.

Nor were they on their part slow to appreciate such efforts, though with true womanly instinct his

A HIGHLAND LADDIE

mother at once recognised the incongruity of their situations, and wisely restricted their visits — a decision made final by a simple incident that had occurred when for the first time she and her husband came as their son's guests to his well appointed manse. He had escorted them on a sight-seeing expedition—to them a rare novelty; and on their way along that street that has made Scotland's capital famous throughout Europe, they encountered two ladies who were among their son's hearers, and who seemed, at first, about to stop to speak to him, but, observing the two quaint figures beside him, with a quick glance of surprise they passed on. That instantaneous revelation of their secret thought spoke volumes to the shrewd mother, who straightway resolved that never again would her son be tempted to feel ashamed of his parents. From this resolve she never swerved, though as long as they both lived visits were occasionally paid to the manse, and as often returned by their dutiful son.

Several times the young minister had visited his benefactress at Avenmore Castle. The countess had followed his career with very real satisfaction, encouraging him in such ways as she could. But when on one of those occasions he entreated her to accept repayment of the pecuniary assistance from which he had benefited so materially, he repented of having made such a proposal as he saw the look of pained surprise on that beautiful face.

“It was my son's wish,” she said, “and it has been my pleasure.”

By her own special request he took part in that funeral service, when amid the tears and lamentations of the servants and retainers among

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

whom she had lived so long, Lady Avenmore's mortal remains were removed from her stately home and laid beside those of her husband and son, so dearly loved, in the vault where rest the bodies of several scions of that noble house. And perhaps none of the mourners in that solemn procession more sincerely regretted her than did Colin Munro.

Popularity has its penalties, and the strain of public work, to any one who conscientiously seeks to discharge its duties, tells upon the steadiest nerves and hardiest constitutions in course of time. Accordingly, when he began to realise that neither the spirit nor the flesh was as ready to respond to the demands of service in a large city, Mr. Munro felt that he must content himself with a less arduous sphere. In this decision his own inclination had its influence, for throughout his ministerial course the love of his childhood's home had never deserted him, and now its peace and seclusion seemed more desirable than ever. When, therefore, an invitation unexpectedly came from Achnacairn, it appeared like an answer to his heart's wish as well as an indication of Providence.

His acceptance of that call had proved satisfactory in every way. He saw his work among the people prospering, and the cordiality of their first welcome had deepened into a sentiment of mingled reverence and affection, without which the ministerial relationship will ever be barren.

There was but one alloy in his happiness; but in order to explain that, another chapter of his life's story must be told.

Among his first audiences he had had one particularly attentive hearer—a very pretty girl of

A HIGHLAND LADDIE

good family whose place in their pew was seldom vacant. Ministerial visits included Miss Skene's family, with the usual result of further intimacy and the discovery of mutual regard, and the matrimonial consummation later. Happiness had crowned the union, and children's voices gladdened the manse.

But two had died in infancy; two sons and a daughter survived; and perhaps it was the recollection of his own early struggles in the way of education that made their father so solicitous that they should lack no advantage which it was in his power to confer. Their progress had more than rewarded him, and he had had the satisfaction of seeing both his boys doing themselves and him credit at the University of Edinburgh.

The elder, his hope and his pride, after a brilliant career at school and college had realized his fond ambition by entering the Divinity Hall, where at this date he was preparing himself for the ministry of the Church of Scotland. His brother, not by his own choice, but in deference to his father's wishes, had gone also to the University, and was still a student there.

Kitty, as their sister was called, was still at school, supposed to be studying very hard, though the aunt to whose care she had been confided on her father and mother's departure for Achnacairn, had been at some difficulty to render such an account of her progress in learning as would content her father.

It was this break-up of the family union which had added to Mr. Munro's regret in leaving his city charge and lessened his satisfaction in settling in the country. At the present time, however, he was anticipating the return of his three children,

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

with the additional consolation of knowing that his daughter would now remain at home.

Another source of comfort, too, lay in the fact that his elder son might succeed him in the pulpit he himself had occupied with so much acceptance. Hints to that effect had reached him from several quarters, and as the young candidate had wellnigh completed his theological course, and had on one occasion appeared before his father's congregation to their utmost satisfaction, that hope seemed more than warranted.

Alas, what fatal enemies our best affections often prove. This father little dreamed that the son upon whom his heart was so set had gradually usurped the place of Him who claims dominion there, and will tolerate no idol. To such idolatry, indeed, the temptation in this instance was strong, for in addition to great personal beauty, Hamish Munro possessed a most engaging manner that won him a ready reception wherever he went. Moreover, apart from those external advantages, intellectual accomplishments of no ordinary excellence distinguished him, enhanced as they were by a modesty not always the accompaniment of superiority of any sort. What wonder that the world in general smiled upon him and welcomed him to its charmed circle? And if the incense of its adulation at times overcame him, few were censorious enough to condemn the weakness. Subtle is the power of admiration: strong must be the spirit that can withstand it.

There comes an hour of disillusionment, however, to all idolaters, when the hand of Truth tears away the veil that hides us from ourselves, and we are forced to see that the object of our worship was but clay, and we ourselves the dupes of our

A HIGHLAND LADDIE

own misplaced adoration. How near at hand that time was Colin Munro little thought as he took this retrospect of his life, and turned from the past to the present with a strange yearning to see life's harvest in the brilliant career of this cherished son, all the deficiencies of his own more than compensated by the triumph of his.

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

CHAPTER III.

KITTY'S CONFESSIONS.

A SERENE evening in May was shading into night. On the higher mountain peaks the light of the setting sun still lingered, and across the loch a line of gold spanned its placid waters. The nearer hills wore that rich purple glow that accompanies the sun's departure, softening their rugged outlines as in the folds of a gorgeous mantle. It was a scene to fill the mind with a sense of peace and rest.

Yet the Rev. Colin Munro appeared restless and impatient as he paced the shore of the loch and turned ever and anon an expectant look toward a road that wound over the hill and was lost among the trees. When at last the sound of a horn was heard, he retraced his steps and stood awaiting the arrival of the mail-coach at the entrance of the village, where stood the inn at which it put up. A few minutes later he saw the cumbrous vehicle coming over the last intervening ridge, and as it drew nearer, a white handkerchief was waved by a passenger on the outside.

A smile of pleasure broke over the minister's face as he saw it, and he waved his hand in response as he stood awaiting the arrival. On it came, rattling and jolting over the stony road in

KITTY'S CONFESSIONS

a cloud of steam from the panting horses. Before it had come to a stand, however, a young girl, all eagerness and delight, sprang down and ran toward Mr. Munro, flinging herself into his arms, regardless of the attention of her fellow-passengers, and slightly to the confusion of the minister himself, who, after the first moment of excitement, turned to the coach in quest of another traveller.

"Where is Hamish?" he enquired, disappointment replacing the smile on his face.

"Oh, he won't be here for another fortnight, father," was the reply. "Wait till I get my box down, and I'll tell you all about it."

The box was produced and transferred to a pony trap awaiting them at the inn, and as soon as they were seated within it, and Mr. Munro had taken the reins and with a touch of the whip set the pony at a quick trot, his daughter delivered the message he was all impatient to hear.

"Hamish asked me to tell you, father, that the Turnbulls have invited him to spend a fortnight with them at their home in Roxburghshire. Horace and he, as you know, are wonderful friends, and he would take no refusal. So Hamish had to go: though I don't think he was unwilling, for the Turnbulls seem to have a grand house and live in fine style, from all Hamish says. But he promised he would not stay longer than a fortnight."

These last words were evoked by the look of disappointment on Mr. Munro's face, and the girl darted an inquisitive glance at it, and appeared uneasy. However, he merely said:

"I don't grudge him such an agreeable respite after his hard work lately, but nevertheless I wish he had come—Surely," he added abruptly, "this

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

must have been a sudden proposal, else Hamish would have notified us of it."

"Yes, I think it was," answered his daughter, "but he said he would write as soon as he got there."

Mr. Munro seemed to be ruminating on those words, as in silence he guided the pony up the steep ascent, which at certain points skirted precipitous depths; and some minutes elapsed before he broke the silence with the query:

"When does Colin come home?"

"He couldn't tell me when I saw him last," replied the sister. "He said he must do a lot of reading yet before he enters for his degree. He looked fearfully white and fagged, and he seems as shy as ever."

"I wish he could get over that," said his father. "It will go very much against him in a world where only those who blow their trumpets loudest have any chance of being heard."

"If he had only half of Hamish's assurance, he would do," was the reply.

Mr. Munro said nothing, and again that disturbed expression gathered on his face. Rousing himself, however, and with a glance at his daughter, he resumed:

"I suppose that trunk holds innumerable prizes, Kitty?"

As that piquant countenance with its arch smile was turned upon him, the brooding shadows on his own vanished like clouds before a sunburst.

"Yes, of course," she returned: "I'll put you all to shame with my learning. You'll have to watch your P's and Q's now, father, in case I trip you up."

"It was kind to put me on my guard, Kitty,

KITTY'S CONFESSIONS

now that I have such a learned daughter to cope with. Your mother and I won't feel at ease any longer. Yonder she is at the gate, waiting for us."

Another minute found mother and daughter locked in one another's arms, while Mr. Munro hauled out the two heavy trunks and carried them into the manse.

There could be no doubt of the cordiality of the welcome there, but the mother's eye searched the trap for the other figure she had expected to see there. Kitty's explanation of her brother's absence appeared to give as little satisfaction to her as to Mr. Munro, though she would not allow her disappointment to cloud the first moments of this glad reunion.

As they gathered round the table supplied with the best that Mrs. Munro's housewifery could produce, the returned exile relieved her feelings by exclaiming again and again:

"Oh, it's nice to be home once again. 'There's no place like home.' You'll hear me sing that song often now."

"Till we're all tired of it, perhaps," said Mrs. Munro, "and you of us."

"Now, mother, that's horrid of you," protested Kitty. "Just when I had come home to be a blessing to you. I've half a mind to go back to Miss Sterne at Darnley House."

"And carry your prizes with you, of course?" intervened her father with a mischievous air that evoked another remonstrance:

"That's not 'doing to others as you would they should do to you.' 'Fathers, provoke not your children': there's a text for your next sermon, father."

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

“Suppose you preach it for me, Kitty, on Sabbath? What a full congregation there would be; all eager to hear how much better my daughter can preach than her father!”

For answer to this sally, Kitty left her seat and hugged the reverend gentleman with such vigour, that he could do nothing but laugh and feign resistance. It was quite evident that, whoever else held him in awe, his daughter did not; and perhaps those who had never had a glimpse of those domestic episodes would have been slightly disconcerted by such a one as the present. Yet it is ever the truest dignity that can unbend; and next to divine grace, it is the sympathy and the keen intuitions begotten of domestic affection that impart the vital warmth without which the most eloquent discourses miss the mark.

Later that evening when, her boxes unpacked, and their contents consigned to their several receptacles, Kitty and her mother sat by the fire-side—for May had not brought warmth, and a good fire was still a comfort—a conversation began which had for its chief topics the schoolgirl's experiences, in which Mrs. Munro evinced the peculiar interest that only mothers feel as they listen to their children's first communications regarding a world to which they have been newly introduced. Kitty had much to say about her fellow pupils and her teachers, and her shrewd discernment of character expressed itself in terms sometimes more caustic than met with her mother's approval, while on the other hand her eulogies on those who had won her esteem were proportionately exaggerated. No subterfuge evaded her detection, but just as little did she fail to recognize sterling worth or to pay it the homage due. Mrs.

KITTY'S CONFESSIONS

Munro, hearing those animated descriptions of school-life, gradually realized that her child was now a woman as completely as she would ever be. There was now a thoughtfulness on that arch face that was new to it, and as the girl's voluble tongue began to slacken its rapid retrospect of Darnley House and its inmates, the thoughtfulness deepened into a troubled expression.

After an interval of silence she suddenly said:

"Mother, I want to tell you something."

The tone of the voice, as much as the words, caused Mrs. Munro to look up from the seam she was engaged on.

"Nothing dreadful, I hope, Kitty?" she asked.

Kitty shifted uneasily in her chair, as if the disclosure she had to make was far from agreeable, and her heightened colour arrested her mother's attention.

"I'm quite sure you'll think it dreadful," she replied, "but I must tell you, because it has been on my conscience."

"Dear me, lassie, you make me anxious," said Mrs. Munro. "With all your pranks, I cannot think you would do anything I would not wish to hear."

"Well, mother, you must hear it, dreadful or not. I really could not help it. At school we had to do just what we were told, and no one ever dared to disobey Miss Sterne. You must have heard, mother, of that great actor, Mr. Macready. He was coming to Edinburgh, and Miss Sterne, as an exceptional treat, took seats for us all at the theatre. The girls were in ecstasies, and would hardly do any lessons; and when I asked them what sort of a thing a play was, they laughed and wondered if I had come out of the Ark, and began

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

telling me what a splendid thing it was, and how I would be transported with what I was to see. But I felt sure you and father would not wish me to go. I asked Miss Sterne if there was anything wrong in it, but she only laughed and said:

"Nonsense, child! It's a pure pleasure."

"So we went, and O mother! it was indeed wonderful. The play was 'Macbeth,' and it all seemed so real, that for the time being I was in another world altogether. I'll never forget it as long as I live."

She paused, and her voice had a thrilling cadence as the very recollection of the scene seemed to renew its spell.

Mrs. Munro herself became affected as she marked her daughter's kindling face, and she appeared unable to make any reply, though the communication visibly troubled her.

"But, mother," continued the eager narrator, "who do you think I saw in the theatre that night?"

"How should I know," rejoined Mrs. Munro. "No one of my acquaintance, I'm certain."

"Hamish!"

The minister's wife dropped her sewing with a start of blank dismay, and the colour forsook her face.

"Kitty, you must be mistaken," she cried with a trembling voice: "It could not be Hamish."

"It was, mother: I saw him in one of the boxes, as they call them, along with Horace Turnbull and his mother and sisters. Like you, I could hardly believe it at first; but who could mistake Hamish? It was only about the end of the performance that I noticed him, for the Turnbulls were sitting at the front of the box, and he and Horace were

KITTY'S CONFESSIONS

behind: but when the whole audience rose and cheered, Hamish came forward, clapping his hands and shouting out like the rest. One of the girls beside me noticed him too, for she met ——”

Kitty stopped, alarmed by the expression of deep distress on her mother's face.

“This is evil news indeed, Kitty,” she said, “and how to break it to your father I cannot think: for we must tell him, Kitty.”

“O mother! Hamish will never forgive me. Why must father be told?”

“Better that he should be told by us than hear it from others. And a cruel disappointment it will be to him. Ay, and it's a cruel disappointment to me. I mind well, when Hamish left for college, how earnestly his father warned him against theatres as well as other things, and to think his warning has been neglected! Eh sirs, lassie! how am I to tell him?”

“But mother,” pleaded Kitty, “surely it was not such a great sin: and why should Hamish be blamed any more than myself?”

“Ah, lassie! there's a big difference,” was the impressive answer. “It's expected o' him that is to minister at God's altar that he come out from the world and be separate; and folk look to a minister for an example: he's set for an example; and if he's just as worldly as themselves, his preaching canna have much weight. It may be a' true what ye've said about the playacting an' the music an' the rest o't, but, though I was never in a theatre in my life, I aye heard that it was a place where Christians couldna go; an' you've heard your father say it was a snare o' the Devil for young unwary feet.”

Convinced against her will by these arguments,

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

and fearful of the consequences of the disclosure she had made, the loyal-hearted sister could only plead further:

"Well, mother, I'm sure, when father hears all about it from Hamish himself, he won't think it an unpardonable sin that he went for once to the theatre."

"But that's what's troubling me, Kitty," said Mrs. Munro. "Why has Hamish never said a word about it? Does he know you saw him that night?"

"No, mother. He was to come and see me before I left school, but he never came, and only sent me a short note, saying he was going with the Turnbells to Roxburghshire for a fortnight. I expected he would write to you himself."

"What sort o' folk are these Turnbells, Kitty? Have you met any of them?"

"Yes, Hamish introduced Horace to me one day when he came to call at Darnley House; but somehow I didn't care for him. He had a proud bold look, as if he considered himself one of the lords of creation with an emphasis. I should think he must spend a small fortune on clothes."

"But he has two sisters; have you spoken to them?"

"No; I only saw them at the theatre. One of them is very pretty. She and Hamish appeared to be on the best of terms. I hope he won't fall in love with her."

"Why, Kitty?"

"I can't tell you why, mother, but I'm quite sure she isn't the sort of girl who would make a good minister's wife."

Further conversation was prevented by the entrance of Mr. Munro, who took up the large

KITTY'S CONFESSIONS

family Bible from the bookshelf, and seated himself in his accustomed seat at the head of the table, for "the evening sacrifice" of prayer.

"You were not deprived of morning and evening worship at school, Kitty," he said. "I made sure of that before confiding you to the Misses Sterne's care; and I believe their religious influence must have told on their pupils—Will you wring for Aillie?"

Mrs. Munro complied, and the summons brought a plump, rosy-cheeked damsel into the room, who took her seat with an air of such droll solemnity, that Kitty was constrained to smile behind her Bible.

It was the usual simple form of worship familiar in those days in nearly every household among the people of Scotland, and described with such appreciative reverence in "The Cottar's Saturday Night" by Robert Burns, who had himself so often taken part in it.

When the little group rose from their knees, the minister drew his daughter toward him for the good-night kiss, saying:

"We're glad to have you back again, lassie, to cheer us. God bless you, dear."

Kitty's arms were round his neck in no languid clasp, for she dearly loved her father; and that moment an impulse seized her to unburden her heart of the secret that oppressed her; but courage failed her at the thought of the distress it must cause him. No: it was better her mother should make the disclosure. But long after she had retired to her room she lay awake wondering what the consequences of that disclosure would be.

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

CHAPTER IV.

"The setting of a great hope
Is like the setting of the sun."

THE fortnight had passed, and the day of Hamish Munro's return had come.

The minister sat at his desk, at work on the sermon to be preached on the coming Sabbath. On such occasions his face was always grave and thoughtful, but this morning it wore a troubled look, as he paused from writing and leaned back in his chair. Lost in reflection, he remained motionless for several minutes, then suddenly rousing himself, he pulled out a drawer and took from it a letter which he unfolded and read. It covered several pages, the first of which he merely glanced at, but the others engrossed his attention with a painful intensity, revealed in the deepening lines on his fine open brow and the occasional tremor of his lips.

These were the words on which his whole mind was concentrated, to the exclusion for the nonce of his sermon:

"With regard to the pointed interrogatories you have addressed to me on the subject, nothing but the sincerity of our old-time friendship could have emboldened me to answer them as faithfully as truth demands, for indeed I would have been tempted to leave that painful duty to others as well, if not better, qualified to answer them than I am. My thorough understanding, too, of your feelings as a father makes my task all the more difficult. Yet, if not from me, you must have been apprised sooner or later of the facts of the case from others; and their testimony is that the pro-

SETTING OF A GREAT HOPE

missing beginning of your son's theological course has suffered an eclipse. The enthusiasm and conspicuous success with which he entered upon it have not been sustained latterly. In fact, my friend, Dr. Thomson, has informed me of a distinct decline in his interest and attention, and even of irregularity in his attendance at the Hall. In his own spirit and manner I myself have observed a disconcerting change, for which I cannot account, but which I am reluctantly compelled to attribute to worldly influences. Nevertheless, my worthy friend, let us not take too desponding a view of the case, for to a young man possessed of so many attractions of mind and person the world offers temptations subtle and powerful, and which divine grace alone can withstand; but on the other hand, the influences under which he has lived in your pious household will, I doubt not, assert themselves, and the affection lavished upon him by you and his mother is too powerful to be resisted. Nor let us forget that, if deeper and more mature convictions have led him to relinquish the work of the ministry, painful though this must be to you whose hope was so firmly set on this, God may have other work for him to do. In any case, I know you will deal wisely and gently with the young man, and under God's guidance I trust you will have the satisfaction of seeing him occupying an honourable position and proving 'a good soldier of Jesus Christ' albeit in another branch of the army than the one you had destined him for."

Wise words: yet the tranquilizing influence they might have been expected to produce was not apparent in the minister's expression as he restored that letter to its place and turned with an effort to his unfinished sermon. His eye fell on

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

those words inscribed on the page before him: "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord."

"O happy man that could say that!" he whispered to himself: "at this moment I cannot do it."

A summons to attend one of his parishioners, a farmer who had been thrown from his horse and been seriously injured, came almost as a relief from his painful reflections, alarming though it was, and he hastened away at once, as he ever had responded to such calls upon his service and sympathy.

When after an absence of some hours he returned, his wife could see that he was labouring under a discomposure that defied concealment, the cause of which she too well understood. For she had faithfully confided to him not only Kitty's story, but her own interpretation of it, using her wifely tact in doing so, in order to lessen the shock she knew such a communication must entail. Many a time formerly she had felt called upon to speak words of warning to her husband, as she observed the almost idolatrous affection he cherished towards this gifted son, proud though she herself was of him, reminding him of the claims of his other children—warnings which he did not resent, enforced as they were by the voice of his own conscience.

Should their worst fears be confirmed, and the hopes built upon this son disappointed, she dreaded the consequences to him.

With the capacity for disguising secret feelings which she shared in common with her sex, she did not allow him to perceive that she awaited their son's arrival with apprehensions as grave as

SETTING OF A GREAT HOPE

his, and the domestic preparations for his reception went on as busily as they always had done on such occasions.

The hour of the expected arrival had come. Mr. Munro and his daughter had set out in the pony-trap to await the mail-coach that was to bring him. Everything to the minutest detail had been completed; the evening meal was invitingly spread, and the table decorated with those beautiful, deliciously-scented white lilies that bloom in early June, clumps of which adorned the manse garden. Aillie had doffed her working garments, and now appeared in more comely array, after a final, approving glance at the mirror, which revealed a smart figure in a black gown and white cap and apron, and the shining face that surveyed it all with manifest satisfaction.

Finding nothing more to occupy her hands, Mrs. Munro betook herself to the garden, alert for the sound of wheels, and ready to take up her place at the gate. Nor was it long before she heard it, and running out to the road, she hailed the phaeton with its three passengers as it came rapidly on.

Scarcely had it drawn up when a young man leaped down and clasped his mother in his arms with a heartiness too genuine to be mistaken. Tears of welcome were in her eyes, as she took his arm and entered the manse, leaving the care of the pony to Mr. Munro and Kitty.

Hamish was evidently pleased to be at home again, as he surveyed its familiar objects, and as he passed the kitchen, where Aillie stood waiting to greet him with a smile and curtsy, he returned the welcome with his own frank, winsome smile that found its way to every heart among poor and

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

rich alike. The cheerfulness that had always distinguished him did not desert him on this occasion, and as they gathered once more round the table, formerly so well filled, his lively talk prevented any of those ominous silences which the others had dreaded.

A handsome ornament of that table was Hamish Munro. A Celt of the Celts, with the fair complexion, blue eyes, and reddish hair shading into gold, and the refined features of his race, he could never have been mistaken for any but a clansman anywhere in the world. In his lineaments could be traced a marked resemblance to his father, though cast in a more delicate mould, with the advantage of a clear complexion whose bloom many a "society" belle might have envied. Some of his admirers had been heard to say that, even if his features had been less handsome, the smile that illuminated them would have compensated the loss.

And as if all these graces had not been enough, Nature had conferred upon him a stately, manly form in perfect keeping with that handsome face. Truly, a nobler specimen of humanity could scarcely have been found than was presented by the minister's elder son.

He did not notice the earnest, wistful glances bent upon him by his father, unaware as he still was that his secret had been discovered; and if he fancied that the minister's manner was more serious and constrained than formerly, the impression was but transient.

It was a welcome relief to them all when at the close of the meal another call for Mr. Munro's attendance at a sick bed took him away.

The evening was serene and beautiful, and

SETTING OF A GREAT HOPE

birds were filling the air with their matchless trills that seem to voice an ecstasy known only to themselves.

Hamish strolled out to the garden, and Kitty, after a short colloquy with her mother, followed him.

"Hamish, why didn't you come to see me, as you promised, before I left Edinburgh?" she began, after a few preliminary remarks about the flowers, etc.

"Oh, I had no end of things to do at the close of the session," he replied, "and Horace Turnbull would have me off at once to Roxburghshire. Indeed they were all insistent that I should go with them."

"Well, I wish you had come," continued Kitty, "because I wanted to speak to you about something that has been on my mind ever since."

"Indeed? And what misfortune has befallen you, Kitty, that you wish to confide to me?" he rejoined, with the smile that so well became him. "No love affair, I hope, that has not prospered?"

"Don't jest with me, Hamish," she pleaded; then turning to him and looking straight into his face, she said:

"Do you know that I saw you that night at the theatre with the Turnbells?"

The start of dismay and the instantaneous flush that dyed his cheek sufficiently betrayed his astonishment, and he darted a look of incredulity at her face that evoked the explanation that look demanded.

"Yes, I saw you," she continued, "and no doubt you want to know how I came to be in such a place. I'll tell you: Miss Sterne got tickets for all the pupils, and I had to go with the rest. I

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

might have refused, of course, as I ought to have done, but the girls persuaded me there was no harm in it, so I went, against my own conscience. But all my misgivings were increased a hundred times when I saw you there, Hamish. Then I realized that neither you nor I should have been there—you least of all, who are to be a minister.”

That her words had gone home was evident by the look of confusion and distress on her brother's face, and the utter discomposure of his manner. He bit his lip, tossed away his cigar, which he had just lighted, and with a startling alteration in the tone of his voice, said almost sharply:

“I suppose you have told this to father and mother?”

“Not to father: mother told him after hearing it from me.”

“A sisterly kindness!”

“Yes, it was. I knew only too well what this would mean to father when he came to hear of it, as he would have done sooner or later, and mother was the fittest person to tell him. If you had come to see me, as you promised, I meant to urge you to confess the whole thing to father, as you ought to have done, and as I hope you will do at once; for mother says he has had sleepless nights over it. He forgave me, and he'll forgive you.”

Hamish made no reply. She could see he was undergoing keen mental distress. The compressed lips and the nervous twitching of his features, and his restless movements attested it plainly. It was with an evident effort that, suddenly stopping in his walk, he confronted her with the words:

“If you had had a little patience, neither you nor mother would have needed to tell him: I

SETTING OF A GREAT HOPE

meant to do that myself. Ay, more than he has heard from you, Kitty," he quickly added: "I have given up the ministry."

She almost staggered at the words, and fixed her gaze upon him as if he had mesmerised her.

"What?" she exclaimed; "do you mean what you say, Hamish?"

"Yes," he answered, "and I meant to let father know as soon as my resolution was taken; but I judged it best to speak to him frankly and fully about it, and give him all my reasons for my change of purpose. I will do it this very night."

"But why have you changed your mind—after all those years at college and the Hall?"

"Because I have adopted another profession."

"What profession?"

"The stage."

"Hamish!"

Kitty's voice broke into a sob, and tears filled her eyes.

"O Hamish," she cried, "this is cruel. It will break father's heart."

"What nonsense, Kitty!" he retorted almost savagely. "What is there in an actor's profession that should cause him grief or shame on my account? It is sheer bigotry to associate the stage with disgrace. Some of the best men and women that ever lived have trod it. I reckon it an honourable calling, and hope to convince you all yet that a man can lead as upright a life on the stage as anywhere else.—But there comes mother. I suppose I'll have to break her heart too?"

Mrs. Munro came down the garden path with a smile on her face, but it vanished at sight of the tears on her daughter's cheek. She shrewdly

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

divined the cause, and looked to Hamish for the explanation.

Very gently, but firmly, he broke the truth to her, expressing unfeigned regret for the bitter disappointment he was causing her, and trying to disarm her opposition by representations which made no impression on her mind. She listened to him calmly, neither expostulating nor blaming; but when he had finished his defence, she looked at him with an earnestness, a solemnity that made him tremble, and said in tones that accorded well with the words:

“ ‘ No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God.’ ”

Oh, how often in after years those words rang in that son's ears, drowning the applause of a flattering world, and chilling the high-mounting ecstasy of his greatest triumphs.

That same evening, closeted with his father in his study, Hamish Munro fought a battle with his better self that cost him dear then, and dearer still in the days that followed. What exactly passed between them during those hours of heart-searching communion none but themselves ever knew; but when Mr. Munro came out from that interview, the change wrought in his countenance within that brief space of time was such as long years of arduous service, care, and grief, had not sufficed to produce.

A shadow had fallen upon the manse. Each of its inmates felt it only too painfully. Restraint and embarrassment replaced the free, congenial intercourse of former days, culminating in a nervous tension that could not long be sustained, and was mercifully ended sooner than any of them thought likely.

CHAPTER V.

NABAL.

MOST places in the country have their presiding magnate, and Achnacairn was no exception. Through a long line of ancestors the old family at Tremhor had held their sway over retainers who paid them the homage begotten of a feudal relationship as firm and deeprooted as the giant pines and oaks that adorned the estate. But evil days had supervened, bringing disaster to that house, and an accumulation of losses and misfortunes had compelled Sir Hector Forbes, its present representative, to part with several portions of his property, among which the farm of Thornton had reluctantly been sold, for it comprised a large part of the estate.

The purchaser in this case was the son of a fisherman, who, as a lad, often brought his wares to Tremhor House. From that humble vocation, which had contented the old man, this ambitious son had been early enticed by reports of fortunes to be made abroad, and had left his native land determined to return in a very different capacity. Fortune, fickle at all times, proved fickle in this case also, for while she passed by many infinitely more deserving of her favours, she smiled upon him. He prospered beyond his fondest dreams, and sooner than he himself had counted upon he returned to Scotland a rich man. There further good fortune awaited him, for not long afterwards Thornton was for sale, and when he signed the

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

deed of purchase, no prince of the realm was half so proud as Dugald Sinclair.

The change of proprietorship soon made itself felt among the tenantry. Like all "self-made" men, the new laird was inordinately proud of himself and correspondingly contemptuous of others who could not make the same boast. From early youth he had imbibed Radical notions, much to his honest father's disgust, and found no terms too strong to denounce landlords, against whom he inveighed on every occasion as usurpers of the people's legitimate rights. As laird of Thornton, however, he occupied a position much more creditable in his own estimation than any of that class, and was fully resolved to show it.

Fortunately for him, many of his compeers had long ago quitted the district for more lucrative occupations in the towns, but some still remained, who were "a thorn in the flesh" to him, inasmuch as they could recall less sumptuous days, and might in some case of provocation remind him of things he was fain to forget.

In pursuance of his new duties as landlord he had inaugurated reforms on a large scale. Daily he was discovering instances of neglect which had been overlooked by his predecessor, and consequently had many altercations with the tenantry, who on their part resented his interference; but, as he possessed a violent, overbearing temper, few of them had courage to cross words with him. Nevertheless, there were a few who refused to be browbeaten, and on one of those occasions when he had come into collision with a workman whom he was rating for something he had done amiss, the big sturdy fellow turned upon him and said with a most menacing gesture:

"Look ye here, Dugald Sinclair, if ye think ye're gaun to be a slave-driver here, as they say ye were whaur ye made yer siller, ye'll find yersel' mista'en. I mind the day when ye were glad to tak' yer dinner aff a chire, an' I'll tak' nae impidence frae ye, laird though ye ca' yersel'."

Speechless with rage, the insulted landlord would have lifted the gold-headed walking-stick he carried and struck him, but discretion proved the better part of valour on this occasion, for Tom M'Bayne could have laid him flat with one blow from "his brawny arm."

"You quit my service this day," he contented himself with saying; white with anger as he spoke.

"Wi' pleasure," retorted Tom. "'I reckon it nae honour to serve sic a maister; an' there's a wheen mair'll leave yer service withoot giein' ye the satisfaction o' tellin' them to gang.'"

And with the words he took up his bag of tools and strode from the place, the undisputed conqueror in the fray.

Had the proprietor of Thornton been capable of profiting from experience, he would have taken warning from this incident and altered his tactics accordingly; on the contrary, like another laird of old time whom he closely resembled, he continued to be "such a son of Belial that a man could not speak to him"; and although his wealth and the power it gave him enabled him to tyrannize over his new subjects to his heart's content, there was not a more hated character in the district than Dugald Sinclair.

To his credit, however, it could be said that, as he assumed no saintship abroad, no more did he at home, as every one under his roof could testify, his wife in particular.

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

There was nothing of the "self-made " about Mrs. Sinclair. On the contrary, both in dress and demeanour she exhibited quite a different spirit. Her subdued manner and gentle speech afforded a startling contrast to her husband's swaggering air and dictatorial style of talking. She seemed, indeed, to be lost in his greatness, and to have come to regard herself merely as a useful appendage to that greatness. Nevertheless, her subservience had its limit beyond which her lord had found he dared not go, and which inspired him with an unconfessed awe.

On this particular morning, as they sat at breakfast, after some preliminary fault-finding with the dish on the table, he startled his wife and daughter with the announcement:

"What a disgraceful affair this is about young Munro! To think that after all the money his father has spent on him to fit him for the ministry he should fling the whole thing up and take to play-acting! If he had been my son, and served me that way, I would have shown him to the door pretty quick, and I hope Mr. Munro 'll do the same."

He did not observe the spasm that contracted his daughter's features at these words, or the instantaneous pallor that blanched her cheek.

A sweet face was hers. The fair complexion and the grey eyes that were veritable windows through which truth and kindness looked out, the lips that seemed formed for smiles, the finely rounded cheek, and the wealth of wavy hair that floated round her shoulders, made that countenance a delight to look upon, and won admiration and favour from young and old alike—tributes, however, which had a better justification in the

NABAL

loving disposition that scattered deeds of help and sympathy among all who needed them.

Children loved Joanna Sinclair. The old welcomed her with open arms. At school she had been a prime favourite, especially with the boys, whose sports she shared with enthusiasm, in preference to the less boisterous pastimes of her own sex; while they were charmed with her spirit of daring and adventure that put some of them to shame.

As she passed into maidenhood, she made conquests of another sort, and more than one boyish lover bestowed on her the treasure of his heart's first love. But still Joanna was fancy-free, and retained the gaiety of her girlhood, refusing to assume the dignity of maturer years despite her mother's remonstrances and frequent references to her own decorum at that age.

That significant change of countenance which Mr. Sinclair had failed to notice did not escape his wife's keener discernment, and a sudden enlightenment flashed upon her mind. Could it be possible that Hamish Munro was of special interest to her daughter? She had never suspected such a thing, so carefully had Joanna kept her secret, if, indeed, such was the case.

"Where did you hear that gossip, Dugald?" she enquired.

"Where did I hear it?" he rejoined: "it's the talk o' the place. I'm sorry for Mr. Munro. He won't be able to hold up his head among his people. But that's what comes o' spoiling and indulging children."

"I'm sorry for him too," said Mrs. Sinclair, "for he seems bound up in the young man, and this must be a sore disappointment to him."

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

"He must be an ungrateful scamp to make sic a return for a' his father has done for him," continued Mr. Sinclair. "If I met him, I would tell him that to his face. He'll never enter my door again, that's certain."

Not a syllable escaped the girl's lips, as during this conversation she toyed with her knife and fork, not trusting herself to glance at either father or mother; but when the meal ended, she left the table abruptly, and sought her own room.

Not long afterwards Mrs. Sinclair followed her, and found her kneeling by the bedside in a paroxysm of weeping.

"Joan," she asked, laying her hand gently on the girl's shoulder, "what is the meaning of this? Tell me, lassie; you need have no fear to confide your trouble to me. I think I know what it is, though, without you telling me. Has Hamish Munro spoken to you of love?"

The sobs were redoubled, and no words came.

"How long has this been going on?" was the next query. "I wish you had told me, Joan; I might have helped you with a mother's advice."

Joanna rose from her knees, tossed back her hair, dashed the tears from her eyes, and between her sobs said:

"It's all over now, mother. I did love him, and thought he loved me; but he prefers fame to me, and though he knows that father would never allow me to marry an actor, he has made his choice, and I leave him to it."

She spoke with a firmness that evoked the further enquiry:

"Have you told him so?"

"Yes."

"And he won't change his mind?"

NABAL

"No."

"Then, Joan, he is not worthy of you. Had he been the man I thought him, he would not have broken the three hearts that loved him most for the stage or anything else. Try to dismiss him from your thoughts."

"O mother!"

What a world of meaning was in that cry! Alas for the heart around which love has wound its tendrils, when an attempt is made to untwine them! The uprooted tree of long growth must tear up with itself the soil that nourished it. But can a love that is deep and true ever be dislodged from the heart that cherished it?

That cry appealed to the mother's ready sympathy, and laying her hand gently on the poor girl's shoulder, she said:

"I'm sorry this has happened, lassie; but, as you said, your father would never have let you marry a play-actor: he has something else in his mind for you."

"What do you mean, mother?" asked Joanna, with a look of sudden apprehension in her eyes.

"Well, he would like you to marry somebody that has a title," replied her mother. "You must have noticed how anxious he was to ingratiate himself with Sir Hector Forbes at the election, and how often he was at Tremhor. The Forbeses are poor, and a match with a rich man's only daughter would mend their fortunes and bring honour to us."

"Then my father will find that, though he may keep me from marrying the man of my choice, he won't force me to marry anybody else."

Even through her tears the flash of indignation that shot from those expressive grey eyes lent

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

double emphasis to the words, as Joanna drew herself up with a proud gesture, and again dashed those tears away.

Mrs. Sinclair regarded her with a look of almost fear, and knew not what to say in reply. Until this moment she had not dreamt that so much of the father's indomitable will had found a place in that gentle nature, and she had but too good cause to dread the consequences when those two wills should come into collision.

CHAPTER VI.

LOVE OR FAME?

THE forewarning imparted by Mrs. Sinclair to her daughter of her father's matrimonial projects for her was confirmed next day. An invitation to attend a dinner party at Tremhor had come for Mr. and Mrs. Sinclair and their daughter, at which several of the baronet's political friends would be present. Of course, as no one at Thornton ever dared to question its master's pleasure, it was not likely that anyone should have the hardihood to do so on this occasion. Accordingly Mrs. Sinclair was obliged to use her utmost power of persuasion to overcome her daughter's firm resolve not to be one of the party; but it was only by a master-stroke of policy that she averted the storm which Joanna's refusal would have brought upon the household. This would be an excellent opportunity, she represented, of giving Sir Hector Forbes a clear intimation that, if he entertained any such intentions as Mr. Sinclair hoped and believed he had, he need look for no success in Joanna's case.

Meanwhile the poor girl had little thought to spare for anything but her own corroding sorrow. Ever since the hour when it had first burst upon her with its overwhelming surprise and suddenness, she had felt stunned and unable to realize its dreadful significance. Pride, too, had steeled her heart against the tenderness that had its home there; and when love and pride strive for the

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

mastery, woe betide their unhappy victim: for no truer words were ever penned than those:

"To be wroth with what we love
Doth work like madness in the brain."

Deep and pure had been the first love of her young heart for Hamish Munro. None knew of it but herself, and in her modesty she had rather avoided him, dreading lest her secret should betray itself in the discomposure produced by his very presence: for she had read in his face a message that needed no words, and she knew that his heart was hers. Yes, even though, until their last interview a few days previously, he had never spoken to her of love.

A painful interview had that proved to them both. Passionate words had been exchanged between them, and they had parted in estrangement. It was not likely they should meet again, and memory kept repeating each word and recalling the very tones in which they were uttered with maddening reiteration, until sometimes, as now, poor Joanna fled from the house, where concealment was no longer possible, and sought some solitude where she could give vent to her distress, unseen by any curious eyes.

A favourite resort at all times had been a rocky promontory overlooking the loch below, and commanding a wide view of the open sea with its archipelago of islets and the misty hills on the further distance. Within nearer range majestic mountains reared their serrated peaks one above another into the sky, forming a magnificent boundary of the loch. Here no intruder was to be feared, for only the seabirds and the conies had their home among those heather-clad rocks.

LOVE OR FAME?

In happier days Joanna had loved this retreat; she could indulge her wayward fancy and dream her dreams undisturbed. It was now a sanctuary where she could unburden her heart of its sorrow; and it was "an exceeding bitter cry" that burst from her lips as in a complete abandonment of weeping she threw herself down on the heather. So violent was the paroxysm that she did not hear an approaching step till a hand was laid upon her shoulder, and looking up with a start, she saw Hamish Munro at her side.

"Joanna," he cried, "I cannot bear this. Will you not listen to me and be friends? Why will you drive me away, when you know you are all the world to me? Look up, and tell me you won't reject my love. Oh, if you knew how deep and true it is, you could not."

Love's eloquence! Ah, who could resist it?

The passionate pleader knelt down beside her; his eyes looked into hers with a language all their own; and the girl's heart quailed within her, for her very life was at stake—her real life. She could not utter the words that rose to her lips.

The lover saw his advantage, and, resolved to secure it, he continued his thrilling appeal, and seizing her hand, said:

"I know you love me, Joanna, and nothing on earth shall part us, if only you will promise to be mine when I am in a position to offer you a home worthy of you."

"I cannot make that promise, Hamish," sobbed poor Joanna.

"Why not?" he demanded.

"Because, as I told you, my father would never allow me to marry an actor," was the sorrowful reply, "and besides that it is a profession I

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

would shrink from above any other, either for myself or any one dear to me."

"Now, Joanna, why should you pronounce judgment on a profession of which you cannot know anything?" expostulated the ardent lover. "It is mere bigotry that has attached discredit to as honourable a calling as any a man could follow."

"Then why is it that so many good people have condemned it?" rejoined Joanna. "Is your father a bigot? Would he have set his face against it if it had been an honourable profession?"

"My father is old-fashioned, and shares the prejudices of his time; but it is my fixed determination to prove to him and everybody else that an actor can be as upright and estimable as any other man."

A different expression had replaced the look of passionate pleading on the lover's glowing face: it was almost stern and hard, and pride made itself felt in the harsher tones of his voice.

"Your father may be old-fashioned," was Joanna's calm reply, "but his convictions are real and genuine like himself, and the convictions of so good and true a man cannot be ill-founded. I would doubt anybody rather than him. And even if he were mistaken, have you no compunction in going against his beliefs? Have you never thought what a cruel disappointment you have brought upon him, after all the high hopes he had of you?"

"I have been allowed to think of nothing else since I came home," was the sullen answer. "Because I could not play the hypocrite and enter a profession for which I am wholly unfit, I am treated as if I had been guilty of an unpardonable

LOVE OR FAME?

crime. I know only too well that my father is greatly disappointed, but was it not better to tell him the truth than go on deceiving him ? ”

“ Yes, but you forget that he believes the theatre to be an evil thing and wholly opposed to religion ; and with such a belief, how can he endure to see his son going into that life ? Put yourself in his place, Hamish, and think how you would feel.”

Those pointed words found their mark: conscience owned them true ; and a look of strong agitation contracted the young man’s features. He withdrew his gaze from the eager, pleading face turned upon him, and seemed to be battling against inner remonstrances which he would fain stifle. He made no reply, and Joanna went on :

“ Hamish, to show you what people think, my father said the other day that everybody considers this a disgrace to Mr. Munro, and they pity him for it.”

“ Let them think so,” was the impetuous retort. “ It is no disgrace, and before long those same slanderers will have to eat their words.”

An angry flush mounted to that haughty brow, and there was a defiant ring in his voice that sounded like a knell in the girl’s ears.

Then after a pause he said :

“ Once more, Joanna, I ask you, will you allow prejudice to keep you from granting my heart’s desire ? There is nothing in the world that I would put in comparison with your love.”

“ No, Hamish,” came the mournful but firm reply, “ that is not true : you have put fame before the love you profess for me, and you are sacrificing both me and your parents to it.”

“ You are cruel, Joanna, to say that,” cried he. “ Have you no pity ? ”

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

"Have *you* shown any?" she rejoined, lifting those speaking eyes to his face; then in accents that trembled she continued: "But I won't upbraid you, Hamish. You have made your choice, and I leave you to it; but I wish it had been a better one."

"Then you won't relent?"

"You have made that impossible."

Desperate and wild, Hamish rose to his feet.

"Hear me, Joanna," he cried, his face pale as death, and his eyes fixed upon hers with a terrible intensity, "You have driven me from you, and if I go to the Devil, it is your fault."

Without waiting for that agonized cry "Hamish!" that burst from poor Joanna's quivering lips, he rushed away.

The wild impulse to recall him wellnight overcame her, but after that first wail of distress she seemed turned to stone, as, scarcely moving from the spot, she stood watching that figure till a dip in the road hid it from sight. Then the numbness of despair crept like a chill over that gentle, loving heart, bereft of its idol, and dead to all else in the world.

Ah, woe to those who refuse to heed that warning: "Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

TAKING STOCK

CHAPTER VII.

TAKING STOCK.

IN a small apartment in one of those high tenements that contribute their own share of the picturesque to Scotland's capital, a young man was engaged in packing a heterogeneous collection of clothes, boots, books, brushes, papers, and odd articles scattered on the floor. It was evident that he was no adept in the art, for several times the contents of a trunk covered with calf-skin and studded with brass nails were upheaved and replaced, so as to leave more room for unaccommodated items.

In the midst of this engrossing occupation he was interrupted by the entrance of his landlady, a portly dame with a round, good-natured face and matronly air, who held a letter in her hand, but could not present it for the heap of things that blocked the way.

"Keep me, Maister Munro," she exclaimed, "can ye no let me help ye wi' a' thae claes an' books? I'm suir I could mak' better wark wi' them than ye're daein'. Men are unco feckless wi' thae things, muckle as they think o' themsels. It wad be a peety o' them gin they had nae weemen to look after them. See, here's a letter for ye. Hech sirs!" she added with a genuine sigh, "I'm sweirt to pairt wi' ye, Maister Munro, for a gude freend ye hae been baith to me an' my bairns."

"I'm sorry to leave you, Mrs. Dunlop," he replied, "you have been kind and attentive to me while I've been here; but you may not be getting

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

rid of me just yet, for I may be coming back to Edinburgh ere long."

"An' gled I'll be to see ye, sir," said the woman: "the suner the better."

Placing the missive in his hand, as he stretched it out across the intervening pile to receive it, she withdrew; and sitting down in the midst of the confusion, he broke the seal and unfolded a closely written sheet, which bore the heading:

"The Manse,
Achnacairn, June 21st, 18—.

"Dear Old Diogenes," it began, "this won't be a pleasant letter for you to read any more than for me to write it, but I wanted you to know everything before you come home, so that you might be prepared for what has happened. I know it will give you as great a shock as it has given us when I tell you that Hamish has given up the ministry and gone away to be an actor. He came home a week ago, and we all saw he was changed, though he tried to appear the same. I was the first to learn his secret, though it seems father had heard from some of the professors' reports that prepared him so far for the news.

"Hamish was quite frank about the whole affair and did his best to smooth things for father, saying it was an honourable profession, and we would never need to be ashamed of him, for he would show us that an actor could be as good as anybody else. But, O Colin! I think it has broken father's heart, for he never smiles, and when he sits at meals, I often see such a sad look on his face, that it makes me cry.

"Poor mother, too, does her best to keep

TAKING STOCK

up for his sake, but I know she weeps bitter tears when she is alone, for I see that her eyes are red many a time.

"It was dreadful during the few days Hamish was here. We were all tongue-tied, afraid to mention what we were all thinking of. It was really a relief when he went away. That happened very suddenly. One morning he didn't come down to breakfast, and when I went upstairs to his room, it was empty. I saw a letter on his table, and I hardly knew what to do, for I dreaded telling them, and my knees trembled when I went back to the breakfast-room. Mother turned pale when she saw the letter in my hand, and oh, I'll never forget the look on father's face when he saw it. He never said a word, but opened it and read it, then handed it to mother. I saw her hand shaking as she read it, and the tears were falling fast down her cheeks. Then she gave it to me, and I went to the window with it.

"There were only a few lines, saying that in the meantime he thought it was better that he should go away and end the painful situation, since nothing that he could say seemed likely to make matters any better. His choice of a profession had been made with an honest purpose, and he hoped we would all come to see it in another light, and believe that he had acted for the best, though he knew what a keen disappointment it was for us, especially to his father; but he hoped he would more than atone for it by a life that would be a credit to us all. He promised to write regularly and begged that we would write to him. Indeed it was quite a nice letter, and yet it left us utterly comfortless.

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

"We heard afterwards that he had gone by the early coach, but what his destination was no one knows.

"I found out another thing that I am sure had to do with his leaving home in that way. Perhaps you didn't know, though I did, that Joanna Sinclair was his sweetheart. That very day that he left I met her, and I was sure she knew about it and would be able to tell me where he had gone. She tried to avoid me, but I ran after her and implored her to tell me. She said he had spoken to her the day before, and told her he had made up his mind to be an actor; and he wanted her to promise that she would marry him by-and-bye; but she would not give such a promise, and they had parted. She had no idea where he had gone.

"Poor Joanna, my heart bleeds for her, for I know she is desperately fond of Hamish.

"Well, I have told you everything, so that you may know what to expect here. But I am glad you are coming home, for I am sure you will be a comfort to father and mother and to

Your loving sister,

KITTY."

The miscellaneous heap on the floor remained long unheeded, as with that momentous epistle in his hand Colin sat poring over its contents, his brow contracted as if in pain, and distress imprinted on every feature. Lost in distracting thoughts, he remained oblivious of everything else until another knock at the door roused him.

In response to his: "Come in," a tall young Highlander made his appearance, and with a glance at the littered floor said:

TAKING STOCK

"Ah, ye'll be for home, I'm thinking, Maister Munro, and I would like to be going too, but it'll be a while before I see Lochaber."

Fetching a chair, Colin bade his visitor be seated, apologising for the confusion of the room, and the other proceeded:

"I have come to pay back that money you lent me, Maister Munro, and it's my very hearty thanks that you have for your kindness. It would have been a sore case with me at the time if you had not come to my help, for I would have had to give up my classes and go to my uncle. I'm out o' my trouble, now, you see, and my uncle has given me work in his shop that'll keep me and leave me enough to pay my fees next session. I wish you had been coming back yourself, Maister Munro."

He placed a few crumpled banknotes in Colin's hands with a very pleasant smile.

"There would have been plenty of time to pay me when you are better able to do it than I fear you are now, Macintyre," was his friend's response, laying down the money on the table. "I'm glad to hear that your uncle has been so friendly, and I wish you success next session."

"Maybe I shouldn't ask it, but I would like to know about yourself, Maister Munro," continued the clansman, "is it to be the Church you'll be thinking of?"

"No, Macintyre," answered his benefactor: "I'm afraid it'll be a humbler position I'll fill."

"Do you say that? Well, then, I just wish there were more as able to fill a pulpit as you," declared the Highlander, surveying his friend with surprise.

"Not many would agree with you," dissented

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

his companion; "at any rate, no pulpit will ever see me."

"Ohone, ohone!" sighed the astonished Highlander. "I'm sure you're making a mistake, Maister Munro, for it's not every one that has your brains, and few that have as good a heart."

"Nonsense, Macintyre: I'm far inferior to most. But I may be coming back to Edinburgh, and I hope to hear of you then."

An involuntary glance at the letter he had laid down accompanied these words, and his companion rose to take his leave. The firm grip of his hand was hardly needed to emphasize his parting words of gratitude or the smile of genuine kindness on his honest face.

When the door had closed upon him, Colin took up his sister's letter again, and sat brooding over it with knitted brows.

The mental struggle he had undergone as to his own future was now intensified. At once the thought occurred to him: if his brother, upon whose entrance on the work of the ministry his father's heart had been so firmly set, had definitely abandoned that career, would not he himself be turned to as a substitute? Mr. Munro had already made known his wish to have his two sons in the service of the Church, though in the case of the younger that destiny appeared less likely of realization owing to unconquerable diffidence. Convinced as he was of his unfitness for such an office either by nature or grace, Colin had never encouraged his father's expectation; but it would be tenfold harder to disappoint it now.

What infatuation could have possessed his brother, with intellectual gifts and graces of person that would have recommended him to any

TAKING STOCK

audience, to throw away such brilliant prospects ? And for what ? A career that from the time of Greece and Rome had exposed its members to disrepute. Genuine sorrow filled his heart, for it seemed to him as if his brother were lost. What this step must mean for his father he could only too well divine, and he shrank from going home to witness his grief. Could he have been able to take his brother's place and step into the breach, there would have been solid comfort in the thought ; but he knew that such was impossible.

With a quick gesture he suddenly rose and placed himself in front of a mirror on the wall. No flattering response did it give : not a feature of that countenance was pleasing. A prominent, overhanging brow, lank cheeks, an ill-formed mouth, and a nose too large for the face, combined to render it one that neither man nor woman would ever contemplate without aversion. Even the grey eyes were lustreless except when some flash of thought illuminated them, or deep emotion filled them with its softening radiance. A shock of sandy-coloured hair covered a head that would have puzzled a phrenologist with its strange developments. Nor was any compensating advantage furnished by a figure scarcely above medium height and undistinguished by any of the graces of symmetry that go to make up a handsome form.

Colin stood steadily surveying the reflection for several minutes, then with a smile that conveyed a world of meaning he turned away, murmuring to himself :

“ And yet my father would have me confront an audience every Sabbath day with a face like that ! I don't believe any audience would stand it. No :

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

I know what is before me—contempt, derision, dislike, or pity at the best. Nobler spirits, I daresay, will try to conquer the prejudice produced by my looks and to do me justice. A few who know me well will even entertain a true regard; but I have to face a world of dislike, go where I may. Like King Richard, I may say:

‘But I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks,
Nor made to court an amorous looking-glass,

I that am curtailed of this fair proportion,
Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,
Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time
Into this breathing world scarce half made up,
And that so lamely and unfashionable,
That dogs bark at me as I halt by them.

And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover,
To entertain these fair, well-spoken days,
I am determined to prove a villain.’

“No,” he interrupted himself, “I hope I may never come to such a resolution; at least I am not a misanthrope yet, and if circumstances don’t make it impossible, I may win some kindly response to my kindly intentions, such as poor Macintyre has shown. At any rate I must try. So now, Colin Munro, put a brave face on it, take heart of grace, and trust for the best.”

The packing was resumed and carried to completion at last, a stout rope proving eminently serviceable to a weakened lock in resisting the pressure of the over-loaded trunk.

An hour later saw him seated on the stage-coach on his homeward journey, but not with the pleasant anticipations of other days. A shadow had fallen on the manse that was not likely to depart for who knew how long, and it must be his task to share the gloom and help to comfort those bereft for a time of the sunshine of hope.

A THORN IN THE FLESH

CHAPTER VIII.

A THORN IN THE FLESH.

"CANNOT you reconsider it, Colin?" asked Mr. Munro as he and his son sat together in the study. "You are giving way to wrong feelings in this matter. You exaggerate your personal defects. 'The mind is the measure of the man,' and no right thinking person will despise one, however uncomely, who has intelligence, an upright character and a kindly disposed nature. You have all these things, and your intellectual capacity is bound to command the respect of every one possessed of ordinary discernment. If you have no better ground for your decision, then there is no obstacle to prevent your going forward to the work of the ministry."

"But, father, I have better ground," replied Colin. "Do you think it would be right for me to take up that work without any call to it, just because you wish me to do it?"

A quiver of pain passed over the minister's face at these words, and there was a tremor in his voice as he answered:

"No, my son: I have been taught by a sore providence that only God can make a Gospel minister. Your brother's case has seemed a punishment for my error in designing him for that office without waiting for that preparation of the heart which God demands of those who would minister at his altar. The stroke has fallen heavily

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

on me, God knows, but I accept the correction. No, Colin: much as it would gratify me to see you an honoured minister of Christ's Gospel, I dare not influence you against your own convictions; but as your college course has been so creditable, you surely mean to turn it to account. Have you no plan for your future?"

"I have been thinking a good deal about that, father," answered Colin, "but at present I have no fixed goal in view. The only immediate prospect I have lies in the direction of private teaching. I have heard of one or two pupils, who would do to start with, and a teacher in one of the schools in Edinburgh thinks he could send me more. I won't make much at first, just enough to keep me, but a small beginning sometimes has a different ending. At any rate I must try."

"I think you are worthy of something better than that, Colin," remarked Mr. Munro. "Unlike most young men of your age, you make too modest an estimate of your abilities. Your plan may do for the present, but I will be much surprised if you don't take a much higher position than you have assigned yourself ere long. In the meantime you must try to overcome your diffidence, for I believe that God has a place for you which nobody but you can fill. Take it and fill it conscientiously, and He will make it a sacred place, as much so as the ministry, and a centre of blessing both to yourself and others."

Colin found it impossible to respond to those heartfelt counsels, and tears dimmed his eyes as he perceived the marked alteration which grief had already wrought in his parent.

"Whatever my lot may be, father," he said at last, "I hope it will be such as will bring some

A THORN IN THE FLESH

credit and reward to you for your goodness to me all my life."

"I doubt it not, my son," was the warm response, as Mr. Munro rose and went to the window, where he stood in silence for a few moments.

As if divining the trend of his thoughts, Colin presently said:

"Mother tells me you hear from Hamish pretty regularly, and that he appears to be well and in good spirits."

"Yes," was the answer; "perhaps it is as well for him that he knows not what he has done."

"Did he ever tell you what made him choose such a career?" enquired Colin. "He said nothing to me about it; in fact I seldom saw him in Edinburgh; but I have a suspicion that those Turnbulls did him no good."

"You may be right, Colin, but I fear it was a gradual turning away from the right path. The world has been claiming his homage, and its allurements proved too strong. He has courted danger, and yet expects to be kept in safety. I shudder to think of him where he is."

Here the door of the study was quietly opened, and Kitty came in with the announcement that a member of his congregation was waiting to see the minister about the baptism of his child. The visitor was accordingly ushered in.

Colin withdrew with his sister, who at once questioned him as to the conversation he had had with Mr. Munro.

"I knew from your faces," she began, "that you were speaking about Hamish. What was father saying?"

Colin related the gist of the interview, and then

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

listened to a lengthy recital of all that had taken place since their elder brother's departure; for this was Kitty's first opportunity of communicating all she knew about that woeful event.

"I'm quite sure it was those horrid Turnbulls," she proceeded. "They flattered Hamish and turned his head, and they were always inviting him to go with them to the theatre. I saw him there one night with them myself—yes, don't stare, Colin. I had to go with the rest of the girls at Darnley House, though I knew it was wrong. I told Hamish afterwards, but he didn't seem to mind. Indeed, Colin, when he was here, he looked as if his thoughts weren't here at all. But oh, how sorry I am for Joanna Sinclair. She was desperately in love with Hamish, and now it's all over between them. Worse still, she has got into trouble with that old wretch of a father, who wants to make a match between her and Sir Hector Forbes. They say he has fallen in love with her, and wants her to marry him, but she won't have anything to do with him. I pity her, for if ever there was a surly bear in this world, it is her father. Everybody detests him."

This part of his sister's narration appeared specially to interest Colin.

"Do you think she was so fond of Hamish?" he asked.

"I just wish she hadn't been half so fond of him," was the answer. "I think he has been most cruel and heartless, both to her and all of us. Every time I look at father's face, I feel indignant at him for his ingratitude and selfishness. It has broken father's heart."

"It looks like it," assented Colin. "I see a marked change in him both in his looks and

A THORN IN THE FLESH

manner. I wish I could lighten his burden, but I can think of no way of doing it."

"I know of one way," answered Kitty. "If you would be a minister, that would make up for his disappointment."

"Never, Kitty," was the emphatic disclaimer: "I would never take Hamish's place in the pulpit or in father's heart. And besides, you know very well what would keep me from that, as it has from many another thing."

"What?"

"Now, Kitty, don't pretend ignorance. You know what I have suffered from my schooldays till now from the taunts and insults about my appearance. Those scars branded on my soul by cruel words can never be effaced. I have confronted the truth, and know too well what awaits me wherever I may go. Life for me will be a sort of walking on hot iron, and I am quite prepared for it, and have shouldered my burden."

"Colin, I wish you would not speak like that: it makes me cry. Why should you heed what low creatures may say about your appearance? No one with a grain of decency would insult or pain a fellow-creature, no matter how plain-looking he may be. Faces don't count for everything: a kind heart is better than the bonniest face that ever was."

"But it takes time to find out the heart: the face meets you at once, and if it's ugly, few will trouble to enquire about the heart. No, Kitty, I have laid my account with aversion and dislike, and look for nothing else from my fellow-men. But at any rate, I have a sister who does me justice."

And with these words, Colin threw his arms

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

round that sister's neck, and brushed away the tears that were wetting her cheek.

"Don't vex yourself about me, Kitty," he said, by way of comforting her. "I'm a dour Scotsman after all, and I'll warsel through some gait."

Kitty dried the tears, and it was real love that shone through those eyes she turned upon him as she asked:

"Have you told father what you mean to do?"

"Not decidedly, but he knows my decision about the ministry, and he understands what I feel about it, and approves; and I don't think he will object to my plan to take up private teaching. I have been promised a pupil or two, to begin with, and have the expectation of more. It's a venture, of course; but 'nothing venture, nothing win.'"

"I'm quite sure you'll win," declared Kitty, "and you'll be in a far higher position than that by-and-bye—No, don't shake your head, for I know you're as clever as Hamish, and we'll all be proud of you."

"Amen," responded Colin; and then a summons for Kitty from her mother ended the colloquy.

Already the atmosphere of the manse was brightening. The presence in it of their younger son had brought comfort to the hearts of his parents, who were beginning to discover that they had allowed him to be eclipsed by his brilliant brother. An unobtrusive sympathy and delicate consideration on his part sweetened their intercourse. Thoroughly domesticated in his habits, Colin had always been his mother's right hand, nor was it otherwise now in his young manhood. No service, however menial, was despised by him; and Aillie gazed with wonder and admiration at

A THORN IN THE FLESH

his dexterous management of the poultry and his skill in repairing certain damaged articles both indoors and outside. She stood in no awe of him, because, as she said, he was so homely.

In the garden Mr. Munro, who had for some time neglected it, found an able auxiliary in Colin. Mrs. Munro rejoiced to see her husband once more busily at work and chatting with his son, almost like his former self.

At other times father and son went out together on visiting rounds, from which the minister had shrunk ever since his great trial; but now that the ice was broken and he found how truly, if silently, his people sympathized with him in his sorrows, he resumed this part of his ministerial work with the old earnestness and devotion, and also with a return of the deep interest he had ever felt in the spiritual welfare of his flock.

And so the time passed pleasantly and tranquilly till Colin's vacation came to an end, and he left his home with the satisfactory reflection that he had lightened his parents' burdens and helped to revive hope in their hearts. As to himself and his prospects, he cherished only modest expectations, with a full realization of the obstacles that must be met and overcome.

As he dismounted that evening from the coach in the High Street of Edinburgh, it could not have been said that his heart was as light as his purse, though the latter had been rendered as heavy as the generosity of his parents and sister could make it, and the apprehension that its contents might be exhausted before his expected earnings came in, depressed him. However, when he reached his former quarters and knocked at the familiar door, Mrs. Dunlop's welcome was cordial enough to

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

banish the lingering gloom of regret on his face at the recollection of the home he had left; and as the little Dunlops clustered round him and smiled up in his face, he recalled his sister's words about kind hearts, and took courage. Perhaps she was right after all.

BREAKING THE ICE

CHAPTER IX.

BREAKING THE ICE.

THE first week of September had gone before Colin Munro entered on his new duties. The family of the pupil to whom he had been recommended by his friend, the teacher, had not returned to town till then, and a polite note requesting him to call at their house in Castle Street had just reached him on this particular morning.

He had prepared himself for the reception which he knew awaited him from this pupil's mother, and set his face like a flint to meet it.

Arrived at the house he was admitted by a smart young Abigail, who conducted him to a handsomely furnished room, in which he awaited the interview upon which so much depended.

Mrs. Rutherford presently appeared, a dignified lady, plainly yet elegantly attired, and with an air of refinement that reassured the humble tutor as to the treatment he might expect at her hands. Colin rose to receive her with becoming deference, but the expression of disagreeable surprise on her face the moment her eyes fell upon him required all his fortitude to sustain. However, placing a chair for her, he merely informed her that her note had reached him that morning, and he had lost no time in complying with her request that he should call.

Somewhat propitiated by his simple politeness, Mrs. Rutherford proceeded to enlighten him as to her son's present stage of intellectual development. He was a delicate boy, she said, and his

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

frequent ailments had seriously interfered with his success at school. But his worst handicap was a slight stammer due to nervousness, which had exposed him to the coarse taunts of his schoolfellows, and had affected him so much, that he refused to attend school altogether. She had deemed it necessary to apprise Mr. Munro of this, in order that he might be careful to avoid taking notice of the defect in the course of his instructions, because her son was so painfully sensitive on the subject.

The prompt assurance she received on that point from the prospective tutor appeared to satisfy her, and the repulsion she had experienced at first sight of him gradually gave way to a more kindly feeling. She then produced some books from a case that lined the wall, saying he would be able to judge from these what stage of advancement her son had reached. Then followed enquiries as to terms and hours, which were answered to her satisfaction. A day for the commencement of their studies was fixed, and Mrs. Rutherford closed the interview by announcing that she would send Fred to introduce himself to his new teacher.

A few minutes after she had withdrawn, the door again opened, and a slender, pale-faced boy shyly advanced with an apprehensive look at the stranger's face, holding out his hand in a tentative fashion, as if he shrank from the ordeal. Colin grasped it kindly in his own, and placing a chair for his pupil at a table near the window, drew his own beside it, and opened the books Mrs. Rutherford had left with him, plunging at once into the subject of Fred's scholarship, so that the boy's nervous diffidence insensibly gave place to a lively interest in the work that lay before them.

BREAKING THE ICE

The tutor quickly discovered that in this pupil he had one of acute perceptions and an aptitude for learning that promised to make his task both easy and pleasant. To assist in the development of so capable a mind imparted a vivid interest to the work he had taken in hand; and before that preliminary conference was over both teacher and pupil were on such terms as went far to ensure success.

The sensitiveness to which Mrs. Rutherford had adverted in such emphatic terms had attested itself all too plainly during that interview, and Colin's sympathy was at once enlisted on behalf of its victim, who, on his part, as quickly perceived that in his tutor he had found one whose derision he need never fear, and with whom, therefore, he could be perfectly at his ease. This afforded the surest foundation for their co-operation and mutual encouragement.

There was a hopeful smile on the boy's face as Colin bade him goodbye, and Mrs. Rutherford, who had joined them, augured well for her son's progress as she observed the smile. Her own face expressed pleasure, and there was something like cordiality in her parting words, reminding him of the commencement of his duties on the following morning.

As often happens, the lion in our path proves to be a lamb after all; and when Colin Munro left that home, it was with much happier anticipations than had been his a short while ago. The beginning of his new career promised hopefully, and he contemplated the future with fewer misgivings. Nor did subsequent experiences fail to confirm this confidence, for he and his pupil had come to a fairly good understanding of each other, and

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

sympathy, which makes all co-operation easy, converted what might have been an irksome task into a positive pleasure. Fred was as desirous to please his teacher as Colin was to further his progress, and with such incentives the work proceeded smoothly.

But the fee given for this engagement was not excessive, and the young tutor became solicitous for the additional pupils he had been led to expect. He had twice repaired to his friend's school to enquire about them, but several weeks elapsed before his expectations were fulfilled by a note intimating that one of his friend's scholars, who was sadly deficient in his studies, required someone to superintend his work after school hours. The address was given, at which he was to call next day.

Elated by the message, Colin set out at the appointed hour. The house was situated in the Meadows, and its large, richly curtained windows, with sumptuous silver vases filled with hot-house flowers, indicated opulence on the part of its owners. The garden gate, which was opened by a spring operated from the house, admitted him to a parterre stocked with exquisite blooms, crossing which, he found the great house door ajar, and a servant waiting to conduct him to a room off the hall, where he awaited the entrance of his new employer.

More than quarter-of-an-hour, however, passed before the "swish" of silken skirts announced the approach of a stout, red-faced dame, whose very strut indicated self-importance as much as the loud, coarse voice in which she addressed her visitor. She merely bowed in response to his greeting, and his outstretched hand was quickly

BREAKING THE ICE

withdrawn as she loftily waved him to a seat, and planted herself with a queenly air in a luxurious armchair, surveying him the while with ill-concealed disfavour.

“ Mr. Munro, I presume ? ” she began.

“ At your service, ma’am,” he answered.

“ You come from Mr. Wardlaw ? ” was the next query, uttered as if he had been some questionable character attempting to impose upon her.

“ Here is his letter,” said Colin, taking it out of his pocket. “ Perhaps you might like to read it.”

“ Oh, no,” she dissented, with a sharp glance at the address. “ I’m sure Mr. Wardlaw would recommend no one he had any doubts of for a situation of this kind, and he seems quite confident that you are able to undertake it. I may say that my son is not so quick at learning as his father and I would like, and we are anxious that he should have every chance. He has good abilities, if he would only apply himself; and that is what we expect you to do—to get him to give his mind to his lessons.”

“ Not an easy task, ma’am,” said Colin, attempting to smile, “ but——”

“ Oh, if you don’t think you can do that,” interrupted the lady, “ you needn’t come at all.”

Considerably abashed by this polite remark, Colin hastened to assure her that he would do his best in that direction, and trusted he would succeed.

“ And how much will you expect to be paid ? ” next demanded the lady.

When informed that he would accept the usual fee, she exclaimed:

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

"As much as that? I had no idea it would be so expensive. I must ask Mr. Smith before I can engage you. You'll hear what he says to-morrow"; and with these reassuring words she rose and opened the door and said "Good morning."

Colin made no reply, and with a polite bow quitted the august presence; but as he retraced his steps, it was with no eager anticipation of being recalled to that establishment. He augured ill for his prospective pupil there from what he had seen of the mother, and but for his own necessitous circumstances, which made it impossible for the beggar to be chooser, this would have been his first and last visit to the mansion in the Meadows.

It was therefore with no joyful feelings that he received a note bearing that address next morning, informing him that after some hesitation Mr. Smith had agreed to give the stipulated fee, and that, if Mr. Munro would call in the afternoon, Mrs. Smith would introduce him to her son and make preliminary arrangements as to hours of tuition, etc.

Arrived at the house, he was ushered into another and much smaller apartment at the back of the hall, where he awaited the juvenile Smith, who presently appeared, accompanied by his mother. Colin saw at a glance that he had been laughing outside the door, for the ugly leer still on his face as he came forward, which indeed he scarcely tried to conceal, was evidence enough in itself.

A coarse, pugnacious countenance, an eye that betrayed an evil mind, and a manner boorish as any country yokel's, made up a most unlovely spectacle. Instinctively the tutor felt that the task

BREAKING THE ICE

before him would entail no ordinary self-control, and that, even if his patience and forbearance were unlimited, he had to deal in this lad with a spirit impervious to any noble emotion, low and debased in its very essence. Mastering those impressions, however, he extended his hand as cordially as he could, and proceeded to make the necessary enquiries as to the work before them, while Mrs. Smith withdrew.

All through this investigation Colin was conscious of a secret opposition on the boy's part, and the sinister glances of his greenish eyes destroyed every hope he might have entertained of amicable relations between them.

When the interview was over and Mrs. Smith had returned to make final arrangements for the hours of tuition, her son unceremoniously withdrew without even a goodbye, and as Colin, bowed out by his employer, was crossing the hall to the door, he had the pleasure of seeing his pupil, in company with the servant who had admitted him, peeping round a corner and smiling maliciously at his expense.

It was not an auspicious beginning, and the old pain he had experienced from childhood through the same cause—the heartless derision evoked by his appearance—gripped him cruelly now, as it was destined to do to the end, making life for him, as he himself had often said, a process of walking on hot iron.

Little dream those depraved souls in whom physical deformity awakens neither pity nor sympathy, but on the contrary devilish mockery or contempt, that they are making this world a torture-chamber for the objects of their ribald taunts. And the world is full of such souls.

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

CHAPTER X.

"The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men
Gang aft agley."

ACHNACAIRN had been fortunate in its lairds. For generations the bond between them and their tenantry had been firm and friendly, based as it was on fair dealing and good-will, and cemented by deeds of benevolence on the part of the former which made their dependants envied by their neighbours. An equally powerful claim to their attachment was to be found in the service the Forbeses had rendered to their country, both at home and abroad, during times of crisis, which then called for patriots as imperatively as they have done ever since; for it holds as true in the case of the British as of the Roman Empire that the sword must guard what the sword has won; and many a scion of that house had left imperishable records in the Scottish book of remembrance.

The present representative maintained the reputation of his ancestors, and bade fair to surpass some of them. He had served abroad in several capacities, and returned home about two years previously to resume his place as proprietor and redeem the estate from such detriment as was inevitable from his long absences—a task for which he proved himself well fitted. He loved his home, and had an

THE BEST-LAID SCHEMES

honourable pride in its prosperity. For him gay society had no charms, nor did London ever see him squander a year's revenue in its luxuries and dissipations. With a gun on his shoulder or a fishing rod in his hand, the fresh morning breeze in his face, and his dog scampering before him, Sir Hector Forbes was as innocently happy as any man could be, content to live a simple, natural life, that left plenty of scope for the exercise of social instincts and a generosity prompted by a warm, sympathetic heart.

Nature, in his case, had been lavish of her gifts both in regard to his personal and mental endowments, for his tall, manly figure and pleasing countenance left nothing to be desired, and won for him a favourable reception in every company, among the ladies especially.

Of these he numbered a few among the neighbouring gentry whose partiality was too ill disguised to escape his notice, and with whom he was on excellent terms, though the natural ease and frankness of his manner meant no more than general friendship on his part, however it might be misconstrued by them. Certainly, with such potent recommendations to their favour as a handsome person and an honourable name, combined with a fine estate, it was not to be wondered at that the possessor of such advantages should be a fair target for Hymeneal designs.

His entrance on the political arena had not been the result of any Parliamentary ambition on his side, but the contrary, for he was loth to exchange the freedom and interests of his home for the turmoil of the city and the strife of debate; but the urgent demands of his people, as well as his high sense of duty, had constrained him to yield and

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

serve them and the country in another field. These compulsory absences, however, were never prolonged, and the same day that saw Parliament rise saw him on his way to the north.

At this time he was at home, and, as we have seen, was entertaining his political supporters, among whom Mr. Sinclair had signalized himself by the fervour of his party zeal.

If there is any character more offensive to an honest nature than another, it is the sycophant, and from the beginning of their acquaintance there had existed an instinctive repulsion on Sir Hector's part toward Mr. Sinclair which he found it difficult to conceal, despite the political interests that necessitated such concealment. Nor would further intimacy have diminished this antipathy had not an incident occurred which entirely changed the state of his feelings.

Happening to visit his constituent on a political errand, he had encountered Joanna, as she came from the garden with a bunch of exquisite roses in her hand. Introducing himself in the simple, easy fashion that insensibly disarmed any feeling of diffidence, he asked for one of the flowers. She selected one and placed it in his hand with that pleasant smile which none could ever resist.

On learning his errand, she conducted him to her father's room, but found it empty, and she was about to withdraw to seek him, when he directed her attention to a picture which appeared to interest him, asking several questions which she could but imperfectly answer; and they were thus engaged when Mr. Sinclair, with a pompous air and profuse apologies for not having been on the spot to welcome his distinguished guest, came into the room.

THE BEST-LAID SCHEMES

If the truth could have been spoken with safety, the baronet would have told him to go to Jericho, or to any of the resorts to which we consign undesirable acquaintances, and even his native politeness could not altogether hide his real disappointment as Joanna curtsied and withdrew.

It was a case of love at first sight, and the tyrant passion took possession of a heart that had hitherto been free, and speedily asserted its power. From that day a new and dominating influence made everything else, estate and political honours included, of secondary importance to the laird of Achnacairn.

Whether it had anything to do with the dinner-party which shortly afterwards took place may be surmised. As far as guests were concerned, it was a brilliant affair, and the banquet itself was imposing with its array of superb silver and crystal that decorated the baronet's table. But among those who surrounded it no fairer face than Joanna's was to be seen; and Sir Hector's eye swept it too often to escape notice. It made poor Joanna painfully conscious of his attention, though she endeavoured to appear insensible of it.

All that occurred in the course of the evening militated against her fixed purpose to discourage those attentions, for the incidents that brought them together left no room for any decisive indication on her part that they were unwelcome. Her aching heart made all the scene around her a mockery, and she longed for the hour of release.

Two young ladies of the company had gone to the piano, and sang duets. They were followed by a gentleman, whose rendering of Scottish humorous songs had brought him celebrity throughout the district. Then, to poor Joanna's

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

dismay, their host approached her with a request that she would play to them. Surprised that he should have known that she played at all, her native modesty prompted a quick refusal, but her plea that her musical acquirements were of too humble a character to warrant her attempting to play in such a company, was at once disallowed.

"Your father has just assured me, Miss Sinclair, that you have had an excellent musical education, and are an accomplished musician," said the baronet; "so I trust you won't disappoint us."

The eyes of several of the guests were upon her, as Sir Hector stood in a suppliant attitude before her, waiting to conduct her to the piano. There was no escape, so she rose and seated herself at the instrument, while her companion took a chair near, from which he could study her face.

Her spirit was wholly out of tune. She played from memory Handel's "Harmonious Blacksmith," followed by her own transcription of that exquisitely beautiful air by the same composer, "Waft her, angels, to the skies." Whether the sentiment of the piece, voiced so wondrously in the music, had influenced her or not, there was an expression on her face when she rose from the piano that riveted the attention of the listener at her side; whose thanks were uttered in tones of genuine feeling, as he led her back to the seat she had left.

Two of the spectators of this significant incident felt a special interest in it. Mr. Sinclair's hopes rose triumphantly as he contemplated this auspicious beginning of a dream likely to realize his proud ambition to see his daughter mistress of that fine old mansion, and to hear her addressed as Lady Forbes. Mrs. Sinclair, on the other hand,

THE BEST-LAID SCHEMES

clearly foresaw terrible domestic strife, convinced as she was from her better knowledge of his daughter's character that nothing was more unlikely than the union upon which her husband had set his heart. Her equally thorough knowledge of his disposition brought dismay to her soul in view of the conflict now inevitable between two indomitable spirits.

Her worst fears were realized sooner than she expected. Shortly after the occasion just described, an invitation to dinner at Thornton had been sent to Sir Hector Forbes, who at once accepted it.

All the grandeur of Thornton was in requisition for the august ceremony, and every arrangement likely to facilitate the baronet's wooing secretly made by the wiley conspirator and enforced upon his wife, who saw the futility of opposing him in a scheme that involved the accomplishment of his life's ambition.

Sir Hector duly arrived and was royally entertained, Mr. Sinclair's hospitality almost rivalling his own. Flushed with high hopes, he took his place at table with undisguised pleasure, for opposite him sat Joanna, upon whom his admiring glances were freely bestowed.

No hitch occurred at the banquet, which passed off to the satisfaction of all concerned except Joanna. At its close, when the two gentlemen rejoined the ladies in the drawing room, the host proposed that their guest should accompany him on a tour of inspection of his grounds, to which the latter readily assented, requesting at the same time that Mrs. Sinclair and her daughter should join them. Relying on her mother's acquiescence, Joanna made no demur, but to her dismay Mrs.

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

Sinclair asked to be excused on the plea of some domestic duty, and she was obliged to follow the two gentlemen.

They had nearly accomplished their round of inspection when, as Mr. Sinclair was expatiating on an improvement he contemplated by clearing part of the wooding that intercepted a superb view of the loch, a workman approached who evidently had some communication for his master, and with exaggerated apologies for being obliged to attend to a matter that brooked no delay, and which might detain him for quarter-of-an-hour, or so, Mr. Sinclair retired with his underling.

With right goodwill Sir Hector excused him, for here was the very opportunity he had been anxiously awaiting. The flush on his face and the sudden embarrassment of his manner prepared Joanna for the ordeal she had tried to avoid. A few minutes of silence increased her confusion, and the blood tingled in her cheek.

Manfully and modestly her lover pressed his suit. There was the ring of deep sincerity and burning devotion in the tones of his voice as he declared his passion and besought her acceptance of the love he offered her.

"My happiness is in your hands, Miss Sinclair," he said. "No other has had my attachment. Will you let me prove my love by making your happiness my chief concern, and shielding you from all the ills of life as far as human love can do it. I know I am not worthy of you, but I'll try to be if you'll let me. Will you marry me, Joanna?"

It was a crucial test of her woman's heart, for cold indeed must it have been if such simple eloquence had not moved it. Tears dimmed those

THE BEST-LAID SCHEMES

truth-speaking eyes as she raised them to his face and said:

"O Sir Hector, don't think me cruel; but I cannot be your wife."

"Why, my dearest?" he pled. "Am I so unlovable that you won't grant me my heart's desire?"

"Don't make it harder for me to refuse," she cried. "I do value the affection you have shown for me, and if I could repay you for it——"

"The only payment I can accept is your consent," he interrupted passionately. "Why cannot you give it? Is there any other who has won your heart?"

"Yes," came the low, mournful answer.

He looked in her face for confirmation of its truth, then, seizing her hand, he said:

"That is all I wish to know. May he prove as worthy of you as you deserve."

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

CHAPTER XI.

DISOWNED.

MANY a mile had seemed shorter to Joanna than those few hundred yards she traversed between the garden and the house. Not another word was exchanged between her and her rejected lover. He saw her agitation, whatever construction he might put upon it, and she dared not trust herself to look again upon that comely face, from which the light of hope had died out.

Mrs. Sinclair awaited them at the door, and with woman's unfailing intuition she at once divined the true state of affairs. Leading the way to the drawing-room, she bade her guest be seated, trying to conceal her own embarrassment.

Joanna had begged to be excused for withdrawing on the plea of a headache, and with a painful adieu to the baronet, had sought refuge in her own room.

Sir Hector presently relieved the awkwardness of the situation by saying:

"I have had a cruel disappointment, Mrs. Sinclair. Probably you have probed my secret, and discovered my feelings with regard to your daughter. She is the only woman I have yet known whom I would have wished to make my wife, and had I been so fortunate as to win her

DISOWNED

love, I believe I could have made her happy; but another, I find, has taken the place I coveted. I know not who he is, nor have I any right to know, but I sincerely trust he is one worthy of her."

Mrs. Sinclair listened to this avowal with unmistakable sympathy, for so generous and transparent were the man's feelings of deep attachment and sore disappointment, that she wished in her heart that Hamish Munro had never crossed her daughter's path, since otherwise, she was persuaded, Joanna could never have refused a lover so acceptable in every way as Sir Hector Forbes. So real, indeed, was her regret, that she forgot all reticence, and spoke her mind without restraint.

"I can assure you, Sir Hector," she said, "I'm just as sorry as yourself, for I would have been proud to see Joanna your wife. I have no doubt she would have been happy with you, for we all know a kinder or a better man doesna live; and the man she's so fond o' isna worthy to blacken your boots, for a' he's sae bonny; and how she can set her heart on a man that has left her for play-acting is what I canna understand. But, oh, when a lassie takes a notion o' a man, what'll turn her?"

These last words drew a quick glance of interest from the baronet's eyes, and he looked as though he could with difficulty restrain the question on his lips. The expression of his face underwent a sudden change: a hungry, wistful look shone in those steady, truthful eyes, and there was a ring of poignant sorrow in his voice as he said:

"You have taken away the only solace I had, Mrs. Sinclair. Had my rival in her affections been worthy of her, that would at least have reconciled

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

—No, nothing could reconcile me to my loss; but at least I would have known that she was happy.”

Silence ensued, for Mrs. Sinclair could find nothing appropriate to say in reply; but presently her guest looked up with sudden interest and said:

“I assume you referred to Mr. Munro’s elder son. Have his relations with Miss Sinclair permanently ceased?”

“Oh, yes, Sir Hector: it’s all over between them: they have parted for good,” was the answer.

“And yet, after such treatment, she still loves him?”

“I’m afraid it’s too true, poor lassie.”

The rejected lover appeared to be ruminating over some secret problem that was agitating his breast. Then rising abruptly, he said:

“I crave your indulgence, ma’am, if I ask you to allow me to cut short my visit. I feel that my presence any longer here must be painful to all concerned. So will you make my apology to Mr. Sinclair for this unceremonious leave-taking. I am sure he will make allowance for me in the circumstances.”

No demur was made to this sensible suggestion. Indeed, for the last few minutes Mrs. Sinclair had been on tenter-hooks in anticipation of her husband’s return; so that it was a positive relief when she saw their visitor depart.

Not a minute did she lose in repairing to her daughter’s room. The poor girl was pacing the floor in violent agitation, her flushed cheeks wet with tears, and her bosom heaving. She stood still on her mother’s entrance, and confronted her with the question:

“Has he gone, mother?”

DISOWNED

"Yes, Joanna," was the reply, "and oh, I'm sorry for him. You have refused as worthy a man as ever lived."

"I know it, mother," sobbed the poor girl, "but what else could I do? You would not have had me pretend to love him, when you know I can't?"

"Why can't you? He's one that nobody can help loving, and you would find out that the love of a kindly, true hearted man can make any woman happy, if she's reasonable at all."

"Don't tell me that, mother: nothing but love on both sides can make any marriage happy. I would do Sir Hector Forbes a cruel wrong if I accepted his love and could not give him mine."

"Wae's me, lassie! What will your father say when he hears o' this? He'll make the house a Bedlam, for his mind's been set on this match, though I warned him he was making his plans owre soon. I'm just trembling to meet him."

A few minutes more, and Mrs. Sinclair had to beard the lion in his den.

The quarter of an hour for which he had begged his guest's indulgence had lengthened considerably before Mr. Sinclair returned to the house. He was coming from the drawing-room as his wife reached the foot of the staircase, consternation depicted on his face—an unpleasant one at all times, but positively hideous in anger, when his greenish eyes would dilate with concentrated passion, his florid complexion become fiery, and his large mouth widen with the torrent of abuse that poured from it.

As before mentioned, he was under the average height, and the paunch that had developed with advancing years added nothing to his other attractions. As he perked up his round face into

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

that of an opponent in any altercation, his resemblance to a bantam about to crow had often struck observers, and his consequential air resembled still more the strut of that same bird.

"Where is Sir Hector?" he demanded.

"He has gone home," answered Mrs. Sinclair.

"Gone home, without saying goodbye to me?" he rejoined, his voice the premonition of a storm.

"Come into the room, and I'll tell you how it happened," said the self-disciplined wife, as she led the way back to the drawing-room.

Although labouring under great agitation, she recounted the transaction of that afternoon simply and quietly, endeavouring to mitigate the bitterness of her message with all a woman's tact.

He listened with growing indignation till she reached the end of the story, when, fairly transported with rage, he gave vent to his feelings in language which we spare the reader.

"The fool! the idiot!" he exclaimed, "to refuse such an offer! But I'll bring her to her senses. She won't thwart me with her senseless whims. What reason did she give for such accursed madness? Tell me that?"

"She says she respects him, but cannot give him the love he asks."

"Senseless trash! a woman's whimsy! What's love but a folly we grow out o' as soon as we learn something o' the world! To think she would refuse the offer of a man in Sir Hector's position for the sake o' sic a sentimental consideration! I declare she's fit for an asylum. But I'll make her hear reason. Where is she?"

"Let her alone just now, Dugald," pleaded the

mother. "The lassie's no in a fit state for any altercation. Wait till she's calmer."

But without another word the angry tyrant rushed away, mounting the steps two at a time.

"What's this you've done, Joanna?" he cried, bursting into the room. "Am I to be told that you have had the impudence to refuse Sir Hector Forbes's offer o' marriage?"

"Yes, I have," answered his daughter, the steadiness of her voice emphasizing the words.

"And are ye not ashamed to own it?" he rejoined. "What are *you* to set yourself up against a baronet with lands and honours that any woman in the land would be proud to have? Do ye think ye're likely to get a better offer?"

"No, nor do I wish it," was the calm disclaimer. "But I have too much regard for Sir Hector to practise deception on him. He asked my love, and I have none to give, and I told him so."

"Ye born fool! ye have thrown away a chance ye'll never get again, and a' for a mere whimsy. But there's time yet to undo your folly. The man is keen to have ye: I can see that; and the sooner ye come to your senses the better; for it's my wish that ye should marry Sir Hector Forbes."

"I have told you, father, that I cannot marry him, and nothing will **make me** change my mind. I decline to marry any **man** for wealth or position, as you would have me do. I'll beg rather than sell myself."

"And ye'll set me at defiance?"

"I'm willing to please you in any way I can, but this is what I cannot do without bartering my very soul."

"And so this is the thanks I get for the expense

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

I've put out on ye, to get ye a good position and make ye equal to any lady in the land!"

"I'm not ungrateful, father, for what you've done for me, and I hope you'll never have cause to be ashamed of me, whatever my position may be, even though I cannot please you by marrying Sir Hector. Surely I can do you credit in other ways."

Mr. Sinclair, who had been restlessly pacing the floor, now drew himself up beside the bed, on which Joanna had thrown herself before his entrance, and in words almost incoherent with passion, said:

"Joanna, ye have defied me and thwarted a plan my mind was set on, and I tell ye, unless ye change your mind and marry the baronet, ye'll stay no longer under my roof. That's my last word, and I give ye a week to think o't."

He left the room, and the pent up feelings in the distracted girl's bosom found vent in a paroxysm of weeping. She knew her father too well to hope for any relenting on his part; for it was one of his boasts that he never took back his word; and well might she shrink from the prospect she had to face.

No sleep visited her aching temples that night, as thoughts of the past and forebodings of the future crowded on her brain, to make the present all the more hopeless.

Toward morning, just as the dawn was brightening in the eastern sky, her mother stole to her bedside and strove to comfort her, as only mothers can. Joanna told her the result of the interview with her father, and despair filled Mrs. Sinclair's heart as she heard of that final threat, for, like her daughter, she knew it would be carried out.

And it was.

Next day Joanna was informed by her mother that Mr. Sinclair refused to sit at table with her. This, of course, betrayed the situation to all the servants, who watched the development of events with lively interest, their sympathies wholly enlisted on the side of their young mistress, whom they liked as heartily as they disliked their master.

An incident which occurred two days after the eventful interview brought matters to a crisis. Joanna was crossing the hall to the dining-room when her father came out, glanced coldly at her, and passed without a word of recognition or greeting. One of the servants who was a witness of the incident, as Joanna burst into tears, approached her, saying:

"Weel, Miss Sinclair, if my father had de-meaned himsel' sae low as that to me, I wad hae garr'd him ken that I had mair sense o' daicency than to let mysel' be used like a dowy."

The girl spoke with honest indignation, and Joanna could make no reply; though a feeling of shame overwhelmed her to think that the miserable condition of things in their family was so well known to their servants. So deep did this realization of her own position sink into her heart, that she determined to end an impossible situation.

"Mother," she said, as Mrs. Sinclair shortly afterwards joined her, "I can bear this no longer. I am shamed in the eyes of our servants, and openly insulted by my father. I have made up my mind to go away now, before the week of grace allowed me has transpired."

"Where will you go?" asked the distracted mother, her features working with emotion.

"To my cousins in Edinburgh," answered

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

Joanna. "I know they'll take me in, at least for a while, for aunt Sarah detests father."

Poor Mrs. Sinclair shed tears, and sobs made her words almost incoherent as she said:

"Yes, lassie, it's the best thing ye can do. I canna ask ye to stay here. But oh, what's to be the end o't? Your father'll no bend; and what am I to do without ye?"

"Don't be distressed, mother: he won't separate us, and he'll come to his senses sooner when I'm out of his sight. Perhaps he may find that a daughter is something after all."

Once decided as to the step she was about to take, Joanna lost no time in putting her decision into action. Next morning no daughter appeared to take her solitary breakfast, nor was she visible during the later hours of the day. At first Mr. Sinclair took no notice of her absence, but as no sign of her presence in the house was forthcoming the following day, his curiosity proved so far stronger than his pride, that he questioned the same young damsel who had witnessed his rudeness to his daughter two days before, as to where Miss Sinclair was.

"She's awa," promptly answered the girl.

"Where has she gone?" he demanded.

"I dinna ken," was the reply; "but gin she's wise, she'll no come back here."

"You can follow her, and the sooner the better," roared the master.

"Ay, wi' pleasure," retorted the servant, "for I think mair o' mysel' than serve a man that wad use his ain bairn waur than a brute beast," and with the words she whisked herself away.

Still incredulous, however, he sought his wife,

DISOWNED

and demanded an explanation of what the servant had told him.

For answer she put a letter into his hand, bearing, hastily scrawled, this brief message:

“Dearest Mother,

Since my presence any longer in the house means misery to you, as well as to myself, I have no alternative but to try to find a home elsewhere. In the meantime I am going to aunt Sarah, and will write to you when I get to Edinburgh.

Your ever loving,

JOANNA.”

Mr. Sinclair threw down the letter with an oath.

“Her aunt is welcome to her,” he said. “While I live she shall not cross the threshold of my house. I forbid you ever to mention her name to me again.”

“May God forgive you, Dugald Sinclair,” said the broken-hearted mother. “You may live to rue your conduct.”

CHAPTER XII.

A MEETING.

DESPITE the treatment for which he had prepared himself, Colin Munro was gradually making progress along a toilsome course. His pupils had increased, and those of them who were willing to learn did him credit by their success; and the few who appreciated his efforts to assist them in their difficulties and fit them for the studies awaiting them at college, found in him a friend as well as a tutor. They perceived that he was as interested in their progress as themselves, and equally proud of their achievements. Work in such cases was a labour of love, and pleasant as all such labour is.

In one of his pupils, however, he had to encounter stubborn obstinacy and an antipathy that no efforts on his part could counteract. This was the lad, Tom Smith, already introduced to the reader. From the commencement of their association this youth had lost no opportunity of irritating and insulting the patient teacher, who bore with his malevolence uncomplainingly till it reached a limit beyond which patience could not go. Convinced that further attempts to overbear this opposition would be futile, Colin at last was compelled to announce his intention of discontinuing his attendance at the house.

Mrs. Smith received the intimation with surprise, as no complaint had yet been made to her of her son's misbehaviour, and she insisted on

A MEETING

knowing his reason for terminating the engagement. Unwilling as he was to enlighten her as to the boy's character, Colin was obliged to state the naked truth, which the fond mother resented as an undeserved impeachment of her darling. As further discussion would have only accentuated their disagreement, he merely repeated his regret at the unhappy result of his labours.

"Unhappy, indeed," was the retort, "for it has cost me and my husband a good deal more than we were willing to pay, and a' for nothing; for my son has good abilities, if you had known how to bring them out. And as for his misbehaviour, it's very strange that nobody else has had a word to say against him. But there's others that'll think differently, and have better manners, and, it's to be hoped, a more agreeable appearance."

"I thank you for the compliment, Mrs. Smith," returned Colin, with a quiet dignity that galled the vulgar woman more than the retaliation she expected would have done. "And now I beg to take my leave."

"Very well," she replied, "I'll get you your wages."

"Pray, don't trouble yourself, ma'am," interposed Colin. "I decline to accept any payment at your hands. Good day."

In blank astonishment she saw him lift his cap and the books he had been using with his pupil, and quit the room.

He had got half way through a passage leading to the hall and which was always badly lighted when suddenly he fell over some unseen obstacle, and when he staggered to his feet, blood was flowing from his temple. His head had crashed in falling against a sharp edge of the wainscot.

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

Mrs. Smith heard the fall, and in consternation at sight of the blood was advancing to assist him, when he stopped her, saying:

"Take care, ma'am: there's a piece of cord stretched across the floor."

Yes, it was true, and the mother had no difficulty in surmising who had put it there, and for what purpose.

Without another word, or waiting to hear her attempts at an apology and offers of assistance, the outraged tutor bade a final adieu to Grandsby Mansions.

In spite of his efforts to staunch the flow of blood from his temple, it showed no abatement, and his saturated handkerchief was no longer of any use, so that he made haste to reach the nearest pharmacist's shop to procure aid. He had some distance to traverse, however, before he found one. And not too soon, for, weakened by the loss of blood, he was giddy and faint. The wound, however, was dressed with care, and after a restorative of some sort, he was able to seek his lodgings.

On seeing his white face and bandaged head, his landlady stood aghast.

"Losh keep me, Maister Munro! whaur hae ye been?" she exclaimed. "What's come owre ye?"

"I got a bad fall, Mrs. Dunlop," he answered; "but it looks worse than it is, so don't be alarmed, but bring me a cup of tea, for I'm very thirsty."

The tea was promptly brought and drunk greedily, but when he sat down to his evening work among books and papers, his head swam so, that he had to desist and retire to bed; which, of course, alarmed Mrs. Dunlop, who, without asking

A MEETING

his permission, set off in quest of the doctor who had attended her and her children, and brought him back with her.

A brief examination of the patient proved that he had fevered, and in peremptory terms Colin was ordered to remain in bed till the doctor saw him again. Five days elapsed, however, before permission was given to leave it, and Colin had to pencil short notes of apology to his pupils for his compulsory absence, which Mrs. Dunlop duly posted.

During those hours of enforced illness his active brain craved occupation. Procuring paper and pencil, he began putting his thoughts into words. As he proceeded, the task became more and more pleasant, and to himself his facility of expression was a surprise. A classical education had developed a taste for the noblest ideals in literature; and as appreciation often leads to imitation, he now conceived the project of achieving something praiseworthy himself. Indeed, so engrossed did he become in this new vocation, that it was with considerable regret that he received permission to resume his ordinary duties. A new and dominating influence had begun to exert its power, and his tutorial efforts no longer harassed him as heretofore, while life itself brightened in the sunshine of hope.

He had completed his round of teaching on this first day of resumed work, and was standing before a bookseller's shop, where a tempting assortment of volumes both new and old invited inspection, when a gentle tap on his shoulder caused him to turn round, and to his astonishment, he found himself face to face with Joanna Sinclair.

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

"Miss Sinclair!" he exclaimed, his pale cheek crimsoning, "I did not expect to see you here. Have you newly come from Achnacairn?"

"Yes," she answered, "I'm on a visit to my cousins. But what has happened to your head?" she asked abruptly, noticing the bandage.

"Oh, it's nothing," he assured her; "only an awkward fall I got a few days ago, though this bandage makes me look as if I had come from the wars. Are you intending staying here for some time?"

"I can't say," was the hesitating reply. "I'm so glad I've met you, Colin, for you may be able to help me."

Very much surprised, he responded:

"Certainly I'll help you to the best of my ability. I hope your difficulty isn't very serious?"

Joanna was silent for a moment or two before asking a question in turn.

"Have you heard lately from Kitty?"

"No: the usual weekly letter has not come," he answered. "I hope nothing is wrong at home. Did you hear of them before you left?"

"No, but mother would have been sure to know if anything had been amiss.—Colin," she added abruptly, "where are you staying? Could I walk along with you for a bit?"

"I'll walk along with you rather," he proposed. "My lodgings are not in such an eligible part of the town as your cousin's house."

Readily accepting his convoy, she walked in silence by his side for a short distance, then in calm, deliberate tones she said:

"I have run away from home."

Colin stood still and regarded her in utter amazement.

A MEETING

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Since Kitty has not enlightened you, I must be my own accuser," was the reply. "But indeed, Colin, did your sister never mention anything to you about Sir Hector Forbes and myself?"

"Yes, Joanna, she did," said he. "She gave me to understand that it was your father's wish that you should marry him."

"That is true, and I might have been his wife had I been heartless enough to marry for money; but nothing in the world will tempt me to do that. I told father so, and because I won't obey him and demean myself by taking advantage of an honourable man's love, to win a better position, he has banished me from my home. Poor mother is broken-hearted about it, but she approves of what I have done; though she would have liked me to accept Sir Hector if I could have done so with the right feelings."

"I'm more sorry for you, Joanna, than I can tell you," said Colin, his serious looks bearing ample witness to the sincerity of the words. "I wish I could help you, if it was for this you asked my help; but what can I do? Your aunt: what does she advise?"

"She thinks I have done right, and she wishes me to make my home with her; but you know, she is a widow with three children to bring up, and mother told me she is poor. So I cannot be an additional burden on her. And that brings me to what I wanted to say to you. I must maintain myself in some way, for mother won't be able to help me. My father exacts an account of every penny he gives her, and I know he won't allow her to send me anything. Perhaps he hopes to starve me into surrender. O Colin," she cried im-

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

ploringly, "do you think I could get a situation as governess in some respectable family? I have had a good education, especially in music, and I think I could teach the ordinary things like grammar and geography and such like. Do you know of anyone who would employ me? I would accept a small salary, just enough to pay for my board at aunt's: for she insists that I'll make my home with her?"

"I don't know of anyone just at present," answered Colin, "but among my employers I may chance to hear of an opening for you, Joanna, and be sure I'll lose no time in letting you know, should the place be worth your acceptance. But it distresses me to think that the heiress of Thornton should be seeking such a thing. How will you reconcile yourself to a life of drudgery? Already I have tasted some of the bitterness of such service, and how will you endure it?"

"I have endured worse," she returned with a smile that spoke what her lips did not utter.

The mournfulness of her voice touched a heart ever ready to respond to the call of sorrow or need, and Colin's face shone with a compassion almost divine as he contemplated hers, so beautiful even in its sadness and hopelessness. Well he knew whose hand had dealt the blow that shattered her happiness, and angry emotions kindled in his breast.

As if she had divined the trend of his reflections, she said in a trembling voice:

"Colin, do you know anything of Hamish? Where is he?"

"I do not know," he answered. "He never writes to me, though they hear from him at home sometimes."

A MEETING

She was silent, and as they had now approached her destination, she stopped, saying:

"You'll remember me, Colin, won't you, and let me hear from you should you come to know of any place for me? You know my address?"

"Depend upon me, Joanna," he replied, "Nothing could give me more satisfaction than to be able to help you in any way whatever. I have hope that I may ere long."

"How good and kind you are, Colin," she responded. "Take my heart's best thanks: that's all I have to give you."

There was a quiver in her voice as she spoke the words and held out her hand.

"Don't thank me," said Colin, gripping that little hand with no light pressure. "Good-night, Joanna."

"Good-night," she returned, smiling through her tears, as she watched him turn away towards his solitary quarters in the Canongate.

CHAPTER XIII.

“THE ADVERTISER.”

COLIN MUNRO was not one of those who acquire a reputation for generosity and win popularity by their copious promises of benefits they have no intention of conferring. The undertaking he had given to Miss Sinclair to secure her a situation if such could be found kept him constantly on the watch for any possible opening. And very opportunely, some days after his meeting with her, when engaged with his pupil at Mrs. Rutherford's, that lady came into the room, and informed him that a friend of hers in the town had called upon her to enquire whether she knew of any one qualified for the position, and certified by good references, who could undertake the duties of nursery governess in her family.

Right gladly did the tutor answer the enquiry, and at once gave Miss Sinclair's address, recommending her in terms so particularly cordial, that Mrs. Rutherford smiled and said:

“Then she is a friend of your own?”

The point of this query completely escaped his notice, as in the genuine satisfaction of his heart at being able to befriend one so much in need he had no thought of himself at all.

“Oh, yes,” he answered simply, “I have known her for a good many years, and I don't think you could find a more amiable or accomplished lady anywhere. I can guarantee that your friend will

"THE ADVERTISER"

be able to congratulate herself on securing Miss Sinclair as a companion for her children."

The significant smile still remained on Mrs. Rutherford's face as she replied:

"Then, if you will be so good as write down her address, I'll send it to my friend, who can arrange for an interview with Miss Sinclair. I should think your credentials would be sufficient."

In a trice the address was written on a scrap of paper and handed to her. Then, apologising for having interrupted the studies, Mrs. Rutherford withdrew.

That same day Colin posted a letter to the same address, acquainting his friend with this auspicious fulfilment of their hopes, so that she might be prepared for the expected communication.

Within the course of that week Mrs. Rutherford informed him that his favourable opinion of Miss Sinclair was shared by her friend, whose interview with her had proved entirely satisfactory, and it was almost settled that the engagement should begin at once.

With a light heart the tutor repaired to his lodgings that evening, eager to communicate this welcome message to Miss Sinclair.

At the top of the long flight of winding stairs that had to be climbed so often Mrs. Dunlop was awaiting him with a look of wondrous mystery on her broad, rubicund countenance.

"Wheesht, Maister Munro," she whispered, as he mounted the last of the sixty-two steps, "wha do ye think's in there wantin' to see ye? A leddy that says she kens ye an' yer folk. I wasna for lettin' her in ava, but she threipit she kent ye, an' I could see by her face she was tellin' nae lee."

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

"Yes, yes, Mrs. Dunlop," he assured her, "I know who it is—an old friend of mine. I'll see her at once"; and he stepped into his small sanctum, where, sure enough, sat Joanna Sinclair, awaiting him.

Her bonny face was bonnier than ever, lit up with the smile of hope and kindness, as she rose to greet him.

"I see you know what has brought me here," she said; "and, O Colin, I know whom I have to thank for my good fortune; and yet I have no words that could tell you half I have in my heart to say."

"No need to thank me, Joanna," he answered: "it was merely by chance I heard of this situation, and truly glad I am it has come so soon. Do you think you'll like the place?"

"I am almost sure I shall. Mrs. Willoughby received me most kindly, and seemed to have no doubt that I would be able for my duties. She introduced me to her children, and I loved them on the spot. My sole regret is that I must leave aunt Sarah and live in their house, but there's compensation for that too, because the salary I am getting is more than I expected, and I can save all my money. You can't think what a boon this is to me, Colin. Mother will be relieved about me. As for father, I suppose I have put myself out of his reckoning altogether. I can see from poor mother's letters that he has made her miserable enough, though she says little about it. Poor mother! she was worthy of a better fate.—But I must run away, for I want to let her know of my good fortune as soon as possible.—This is not like the manse, Colin," she added with a mournful

survey of the homely apartment. “How lonely you must be!”

“I suppose loneliness will be my fate, Joanna,” he replied, with the expressive smile that always had something of sadness in it; “but I’ll get used to it in time, perhaps.”

“No, no, Colin, you mustn’t say that,” she dissented. “I predict a much happier destiny for you. No one with so kind a heart as yours could be lonely. Take me for an example. See how I am molesting you, and shocking that decent woman yonder by hunting you in this way. Who knows what she’ll say to you when I’m gone!”

She held out her hand in the frank, engaging way that won her so many friends, and with another tribute of thanks and the smile that enhanced it tenfold, she preceded him down those exhausting stairs, as the foot of which she waved him farewell, saying:

“Don’t think you’ve got rid of me yet, Colin: I’ll pounce in on you unexpectedly one of these days.”

He stood watching her graceful figure till it disappeared round a corner of the street. Then ascending once more to his solitary chamber, he sat down to the meal which had not been made more palatable by this delay; though Mrs. Dunlop’s interest in the visitor overcame her vexation, as she set it on the table.

To allay her curiosity, Colin merely mentioned that Miss Sinclair had found it necessary to leave home and seek a situation in Edinburgh, and that she had come that night to apprise him that she had been successful in finding one. With this explanation, accordingly, the good woman had to be

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

content; though what speculations were rife in her own mind she did not divulge.

The meal over and the table cleared, books and papers replaced knives and forks and dishes, and the tutor was soon immersed in his work. Some of his pupils' exercises engaged his attention for an hour or two, then, sweeping them aside, he drew forth from a drawer in the cumbrous chest behind him some closely written pages, over which he pored long and earnestly.

"Will it do?" he muttered to himself. "I wonder whether he'll even look at it. Well, I must try: if it's rejected, it will be only another item in my long list of disappointments."

Next morning saw him on his way to a certain rather dilapidated building in the High Street, along the front of which in bold lettering appeared the words, "The Advertiser Printing Office." At the door he paused for a moment before seeking admittance, and drew from his pocket those same neatly folded sheets; then summoning courage, he knocked and entered.

On enquiring for the editor, he was informed that he had not yet come in. Had he any communication on business? For answer Colin handed the clerk his packet, with the request that he would put it into the editor's hands, and withdrew.

All through the subsequent days, amid his ordinary work, that unlovely building stood before his mind's eye, invested with an interest which no other had ever inspired, and with anticipations which only those beginning a daring enterprise can understand, he waited for the expected letter from that establishment.

It came at length, its contents brief but hopeful.

"THE ADVERTISER"

The editor requested him to call next day, in the morning if convenient. Accordingly, with a heart beating high with expectancy, Colin repaired to the house of destiny.

An urchin with a consequential air conducted him to a room which presented a scene of confusion; bundles of newspapers piled one on another, the floor covered with loose sheets, surrounding like a flowing sea a table heaped in its turn with a mass of correspondence and MSS., books, ledgers, etc.

Seated at this table was an individual who looked as if he had newly tumbled out of bed, so slovenly was his general appearance, his thick black hair as toozled as if it had not been touched by comb or brush for days, and his face far from "shining," at least what of it was not covered by a luxuriant beard and whiskers. A neckerchief did duty for a collar, and the coat he wore hung loosely about him, as if it had been made for somebody of ampler proportions. Certainly, personal adornment received small attention from him.

"Good morning. Take a seat if you can find one," said he, rising and clearing the only available chair of its encumbrances. "You are Mr. Munro, I suppose?"

"At your service, sir," assented Colin, trying to look as phlegmatic as possible.

"Well, I've read your article," proceeded the editor, "and though it's a good deal outside the scope of 'The Advertiser,' it might come in handy at a time. But have you done nothing of a more practical sort—up to date, I mean? You see, for one that could appreciate a highly

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

intellectual production of this description, twenty would prefer something light and entertaining."

"I have nothing of the kind you mean by me," replied Colin, trying to repress that rebellious agitation that had increased at finding, instead of the curt rejection he had expected, an encouragement beyond his highest hopes. "I think," he added, "I could meet your wishes, if you care to give me a trial."

"It so happens that I have lost one of my contributors, who has joined the staff of a London paper," continued the editor. "He did that sort of work for me, and if you can fill his place, I'm prepared to give you a trial. See here," he added, rising abruptly and rummaging among one of the heaps on the floor, from which he selected a newspaper; "take this, and read that column," indicating one with his finger. "When you've grasped it, call again to-morrow, and we may manage to come to an arrangement. In the meantime, I'll keep your paper till I get a corner for it in 'The Advertiser.' Now, I must get on with my work, so good morning. I'll look for you to-morrow."

It was a gray day, with a haar coming up from the Forth that obliterated all Dunedin's beauty, and gave the lion on Arthur's seat a spectral appearance; yet for Colin Munro it was one of the brightest days he had ever seen. The light of hope, than which life knows no brighter luminary, had arisen on his beclouded path, revealing in the far distance the goal on which his heart was set. Yes, until now that goal had appeared utterly beyond his reach, and he had convinced himself of this so thoroughly, as to relinquish the very thought of such an ambition,

"THE ADVERTISER"

till in a moment of caprice the old bent of his mind reasserted itself, and he yielded to the impulse. The violent reaction of his feelings under this sudden and unique surprise almost overcame him, and for the remainder of that red-letter day, he seemed to be in a dream, and found himself obliged more than once to apologize to his pupils for inattention to his tutorial duties.

Long after Mrs. Dunlop and her offspring had lain down to rest he sat at his table, poring over those columns in "The Advertiser" which challenged his capacity to reproduce. The entire trend of those articles was new to him and far from congenial; but when did any novice refuse to attempt a step likely to lead to success? Colin, at any rate, was not an exception, and ere he sought his bed he had covered sheet after sheet with writing, and in his dreams he saw his name blazoned on a larger page in the temple of fame.

CHAPTER XIV.

A WINDFALL.

EARLY the following morning Colin Munro was on his way to the premises of "The Advertiser," but on arriving found that its editor had not yet made his appearance; and after waiting as long as his tutorial engagements permitted, he was obliged to leave his MSS. at the office, promising to call later in the day. The intervening hours were hours of anxiety for him, and he was glad when at last he was to know his fate, and entered the editor's room, where that august personage sat amid the same scene of disorder as on his previous visit.

Colin's smile was rather nervous, as Mr. Cruickshank greeted him in the nonchalant style that seems to be reckoned an editorial privilege, when humble petitioners bespeak their favour, and produced from the avalanche of paper a chair for his visitor.

"Well, I've read this," said the disposer of literary fate, pointing to Colin's MS. before him. "It's pretty creditable on the whole, considering it's your first attempt at this sort of thing, and I daresay you'll get into it with more practice. You would need to alter your style a bit, for our readers arena so well versed in the classics as you seem to be, and something plainer would suit them better. I have "copy" for the next two or three

A WINDFALL

days, but you can try your hand on something for Thursday; and if you come here to-morrow, I'll give you a hint or two that'll help you for your future work. If it turns out what I want, then I'll make it permanent."

Almost trembling under the excess of delight that filled his heart at this announcement, Colin could hardly find words to express his thankfulness, and wrung his patron's hand in lieu of suitable terms. So overjoyed, indeed, was he, that he was taking his departure without any thought of such a thing as remuneration, when his benefactor said:

"I suppose this to be done for nothing?"

Colin smiled, saying he would be willing to accept whatever Mr. Cruickshank considered his work deserved.

"Then you'll be content with the same as your predecessor?"

"Certainly."

"Agreed. I'll pay you a couple of guineas weekly. Will that suit?"

"Quite well, Mr. Cruickshank, and I thank you again for the greatest favour you could have bestowed on me." And with these words Colin left the office, his heart as light as if that dingy office had been a gold mine at his disposal. A new interest had entered his secluded life, and he welcomed it as a refuge from an unfriendly world.

The prescribed test proved successful, and he found himself permanently engaged on the staff of "The Advertiser," no longer wholly dependent on the precarious fees of pupils, of whom many accidents might deprive him at any time. Nevertheless, his duties as preceptor were favourably affected by this powerful incentive to energy. Ah,

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

Hope, the charmer! where is the dark cloud thou canst not gild with a silver lining? Truly, in a worldly as well as in a spiritual sense, it may be said: "We are saved by hope."

The marked alteration in her lodger did not escape the observant eye of Mrs. Dunlop, who discovered an infallible clue to it in the recent visit to him of that attractive young lady, who appeared to be on such good terms with him; but though hints in this direction were forthcoming on several occasions, they evoked nothing more from him than an amused smile. Once only he met her sally with the remark:

"You forget, Mrs. Dunlop, that I'm no bonny, and that's a sin none of your sex can forgive."

"Na, na, Maister Munro," dissented the worthy matron, "I'll no let ye awa wi' that. We're no a' sic fules as that, though maybe a wheen glaikit lasses think a face is everything. They sune find oot they're sair mista'en, gin they get the brawest man that ever steppit. Dinna tell me, Maister Munro: I'll see ye wedded yet; and gin ye get as bonny a wife as that ane that was here the ither nicht, I'll be blithe an' canty, aye grantin', of course, that she's as gude's she's bonny."

"I'm afraid your prophecy won't come true, Mrs. Dunlop," dissented Colin, "though I thank you for your good wishes; but you may rest assured that, if ever I marry, you'll get an invitation to the wedding."

"An' I'll dance at it too, for I'll no be sae auld by that time," replied the sprightly dame, with a knowing shake of her head that bade defiance to any doubt of her sagacity.

She had not alluded to a *sine qua non* of matrimonial prosperity—a modest competence;

A WINDFALL

and at present Colin's earnings were no more than sufficient for his maintenance. To augment them was now his chief object, and this engagement as one of the staff of "The Advertiser" was the first step towards its accomplishment. Accordingly, in pursuance of this new work it may safely be said that his attention was too much engrossed for the entertainment of matrimonial schemes. "To scorn delights and live laborious days" was to be his aim for many a day to come; but with youth and hope on his side, what was there to daunt him?

His literary work now absorbed him so entirely, that no day was long enough for all he had to get into it. His patron of "The Advertiser" exacted his full complement of work for its columns, and in order to supply this, large encroachments had to be made on the hours that should have been devoted to rest. Moreover, his pupils were increasing, so that it required considerable calculation to assign the requisite time for each. Where is the arduous task, however, that success cannot aid and sweeten? The appreciation of his services alike by his pupils and their parents, with one or two exceptions, transformed work into pleasure, while the satisfaction of finding his life of use to some of his fellow-creatures was itself a reward.

As time advanced, however, the demands of his literary work became more exacting, and the difficulty of combining it with his tutorial engagements greater, until he was reluctantly forced to discontinue his services in the case of several of his pupils. The love of literature had long been a dominant factor in his career, and now that an opportunity for its development had presented itself, not even pecuniary advantages had any longer

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

power to divert him from the grand ambition of his life. Nay, he was prepared to entrust himself entirely to this pursuit for a livelihood, should the necessity arise of choosing between teaching and literature.

Already he felt confirmed in this decision by certain indications that his work on "The Advertiser" had attracted notice; although its editor deemed it prudent to administer a little counteracting criticism, lest the result should be a request for a higher fee than he felt disposed to give. The humble contributor, however, was too much gratified by his unlooked for success to think of anything so sordid, like many another struggling scribe, and devoted himself all the more heartily to his beloved occupation—determined to earn the reputation which took precedence of all others in his estimation. The rare good fortune of securing an appreciative patron in the literary world had been his; without which, it may truthfully be said, even the most promising performance may never find recognition.

December had made its advent amid snow and ice, and a keen wind from the Forth swept through the street, quickening the pace of every pedestrian abroad on this bitter night. Among them Colin Munro was hurrying on to his lodgings, eager to begin his evening task, and taking no heed of the traffic around him.

Arrived there, the welcome sight of a letter on his table arrested his attention, and throwing off his Inverness cape, and drawing a chair to the fire, he tore it open and was soon so absorbed in its contents, that Mrs. Dunlop had set his meal on the table and would have retired without his notice but for her remark:

A WINDFALL

"I'm thinkin' that's a love-letter, Maister Munro, ye're lookin' sae unco weel pleased wi't."

He looked up with a smile, saying:

"It's much better than that, Mrs. Dunlop; it's a letter from home."

"Aweel, gude news is aye welcome, come frae whaur it may," she replied; "for there's no owre muckle o't in this warld. But tak' yer tea afore it's cauld."

Notwithstanding this injunction, the repast remained untouched for a good while after the landlady had withdrawn, as Colin read and re-read those closely written pages.

"Dear Old Diogenes," it began, "I have something to tell you worth hearing for once."

"Although we never saw uncle Murdo, you'll remember how often father talked about him and their escapades when they were boys at home. I always thought I would have liked to know him, for, as I needn't tell you, I always had rather a liking for the bad boys—I mean the mischievous ones, and he must have been one of the worst, or perhaps the best. Father always seemed sorry that he left home so young and went to Australia, for I think he was his favourite brother. But at any rate he got on better a good deal than if he had stayed on the farm, like uncle Malcolm, for he made a fortune."

"Poor uncle, we got a letter from a lawyer in Brisbane two days ago, telling us that he died there last October. All his money must have been of little use to him, after losing his three children and then his wife. The lawyer who wrote to father says that after she died uncle

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

made a new will, and left all his money to his own near relations in Scotland. You see, he had nobody else to leave it to. He divided it equally among them, only that he gave father a double portion, because, being a minister, he had less than uncle Malcolm, and aunt Sheila had married a pretty wealthy man. In his will he said he knew that, if father died before mother, she would have very little to live on, since his stipend died with him, so he was making provision for her by leaving more to father. And more than that, what do you think he did? He told his lawyer that he knew the difficulties young men beginning life have in this country to make their way, and that a little help when they were beginning was of far more use to them than money left them afterwards. So he has given two thousand pounds to you and Hamish, and the same to me. Father gets five thousand, and uncle Malcolm three, and aunt Sheila one. The dear old man! wasn't it kind of him? When I heard it all, I couldn't help crying, for he never saw any of us. He is far beyond the reach of our thanks, but indeed I am grateful to him for his kindness to us all. I wonder what Hamish will say when he hears of this. I know what you will say, and I'm so glad you have got this money, for I know what a help it will be to you, as uncle Murdo meant it to be.

"Father has taken uncle's death more to heart than I thought he would have done, seeing that they have not met for a lifetime; and as for the money, it hardly gave him a thought; only he said he was glad for mother's sake. In fact, Colin, he has changed altogether since his

A WINDFALL

terrible disappointment about Hamish. I can hardly get him to laugh, and this of course makes mother sad too. Oh, I often think, if Hamish could only see what he has done, his conscience would smite him.

"We have heard nothing of him for a long time. In his last letter he said he was going with Macready's company to Ireland, but said little about himself. I can scarcely believe he is the same Hamish I used to play with. Who would have thought in those days that he would change as he has done.

"Do you ever see Joanna Sinclair? The gossips here have never ceased discussing her leaving home. Mr. Sinclair has made everybody in the place his enemy, for they all blame him for it, and other things have made him detested. He dismissed a farmer the other day because he had given him some plain words about his niggardly ways, although the family had been on the farm for generations.

"I haven't seen father so like his old self for a long while as when he read your last article in "The Advertiser." He actually smiled and said: 'Colin is going to preach with his pen.' So there's something for you to be proud of. But it's a good thing (for you at least) that my paper is done as there's no saying when I might stop.

Write soon to

Your loving sister,

KITTY.

"P.S. — All kind wishes from father and mother."

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

Colin's pen lagged grievously that night. The vivid interest of the present eclipsed all other interests in his mind, intruding on his thoughts to the detriment of "The Advertiser." That letter had opened up new views of his future till then undreamt of, and suggested bold projects fatally alluring, and which forced themselves on his contemplation despite misgivings. He resolutely turned away from the tempting visions which Hope unfolded, while Prudence pointed to the safe path of duty and labour, and bade him follow it. He obeyed her wise guidance, and for the present conquered; but one of those apparently trivial incidents occurred which we reckon nothing of at the time, but which do the work of the watershed in determining the course of our lives.

WIDENING HORIZONS

CHAPTER XV.

WIDENING HORIZONS.

A YEAR of unremitting labour had passed, bringing with it many of the lessons only to be learnt in the school of Experience, and for which that stern preceptress charges such costly fees. The world had not smiled upon Colin Munro, nor did he expect it; yet to a kindly heart like his its dislike and derision on account of an unpleasing exterior lost none of their bitterness through familiarity. More and more he felt himself an Ishmaelite among his fellowmen, though now and then some noble spirit capable of penetrating beneath the surface rewarded him by genuine appreciation. With his pupils, the innate goodness of his nature obtained recognition as they came to understand him better, and in a few cases cordial relations became established between him and them which made his labours light and helped to minimize his contrary experiences.

Greater success had crowned his literary labours. Increased facility had come with practice, and the column he furnished to "The Advertiser" had attracted notice sufficient to convince its editor that in him he had procured an able assistant. Moreover, apart from the quality of his work, his readiness to meet the editor's wishes and the conscientious performance of his duties had won the goodwill of that august

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

personage and kindled a genuine interest in the young man himself. These sentiments, however, were not expressed in any other way than by a general spirit of approbation and encouragement, potent in its influence upon the subordinate.

It happened about this time that on one of his visits to "The Advertiser" office Colin's eye caught sight of a headline on a contents bill, which was simply the title of his latest contribution to that journal, and on entering the premises, a similar bill was lying on the editor's table.

That gentleman took it up, and pointing to the said headline, said:

"What think ye of that, Mr. Munro?"

Colin smiled and modestly expressed his pleasure at the compliment paid him.

Mr. Cruickshank surveyed him attentively for a moment or two and then surprised him by saying:

"My dear sir, though I haven't said as much, I've been thinking this good while that you're wasting your time here."

The look of innocent bewilderment on Colin's face amused his friend, who, without waiting for a reply, continued:

"There's more scope for a man like you in London, and sorry as I'll be to lose your services, I would be false to you and my duty if I didn't tell you what I think. It's been on my mind for a while."

"I have no wish to leave you, Mr. Cruickshank," said Colin; "I'm quite content here, and you have been a real friend—a friend in need; and where could I have such a friend in London?"

"Well, I'll no say it's the best place to find friends in," remarked the editor, "as I ken by experience; but I have an acquaintance on the

WIDENING HORIZONS

staff o' 'The Times,' and he might put ye in the way o' something, for he's in the thick o't, and could speak a word for ye to some o' the big folks. At any rate it seems to me that it would be worth your while to go to London and see him; and if he canna do what I expect, I'll be owre weel pleased to get ye back. What say ye to that?"

It was a perplexing question, and Colin found himself unable to assent or dissent to a proposal that to him seemed among the impossible things. He could only thank his friend for kindness so disinterested, and request time for deliberation.

Mr. Cruickshank commended his prudence, and in the meantime announced his intention of writing to his London acquaintance on Colin's behoof.

This wholly unlooked for project raised a storm of conflicting feelings in Colin's mind. He had come to take unusual pleasure in his work, and the remuneration he received for it, along with his tutorial fees, sufficed for his modest wants. Besides, his relations with Mr. Cruickshank had become so cordial, that he shrank from severing them. Perhaps had that gentleman been less assiduous in his efforts to promote his success, he might not have declined an offer fraught with such promise to a youthful competitor on the vast arena of literature.

His deliberations had not yet resulted in any final decision when a few days later his patron showed him a letter he had received from his friend of "The Times," couched in such encouraging terms, that a flush of pleasure overspread Colin's cheeks. This correspondent said he had read the specimens of Mr. Munro's work, and considered them of sufficient merit to warrant his making a start in London; though at the

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

moment he knew of no opening for him. He was confident, however, that some post could be found for him, if he was not afraid to take the plunge, and have patience to wait. He approved of Mr. Cruickshank's suggestion that his young protégé should pay a tentative visit to the metropolis and be guided by results.

The lingering misgivings in Colin's mind gave way before this last argument, and without further delay he began making preparations for the journey which was to decide the future course of his life. He deemed it wise, however, not to terminate his tutorial engagements in the meantime, and obtained leave of absence from his pupils for such time as he required, which, he assured them, would not be a day longer than was absolutely necessary.

Unwilling, should his mission in London prove unsuccessful, to disappoint his parents and sister, he resolved to say nothing of his projected venture unless the issue enabled him to announce good fortune.

None who ever repaired to the great city under similar circumstances will need any description of Colin Munro's feelings as for the first time he found himself a friendless stranger, in the midst of its overwhelming vastness, its teeming millions, its bewildering traffic, tumult, and excitement—a seething ocean of humanity, whose rushing tide seems to sweep along those countless strugglers for existence. Small wonder that the young Scotsman stood astounded, with a sensation of utter helplessness and almost fear, and, too, of regret that he had quitted his safe and quiet domicile in Edinburgh.

Fortunately Mr. Cruickshank had supplied him

WIDENING HORIZONS

with some information as to streets and the nearest hotels, and having secured a hansom cab, he drove to the one which his friend himself patronized, thankful for any shelter.

Next morning, on raising his blind, he looked out upon a yellow fog that enveloped the whole city, and made traffic either on foot or on wheels wellnigh impossible. Londoners themselves know what this means for all who must traverse those congested thoroughfares, but to a stranger the difficulties are appalling. Hours were lost by Colin in seeking directions, the replies he received assuming an intimate knowledge of London streets, and it was long after the time appointed for his meeting with his patron of "The Times" when he at last reached his destination in Playhouse Yard.

After a long interval of waiting that gentleman, whose name was Hopkins, at last made his appearance. His first glance at his visitor plainly indicated disappointment, and it was well that Colin had schooled himself to expect this, so that he made no attempt to disarm a prejudice which he knew he must encounter everywhere, but contented himself with a brief introduction, referring to the correspondence on his behoof between Mr. Hopkins and Mr. Cruickshank.

The questioning glance in this stranger's eye seemed to convey a doubt as to whether so unprepossessing a youth could be the person who had so successfully served the editor of "The Advertiser"; but suppressing his feeling of disappointment, he proceeded to business, assuring Colin that he would not fail to do his utmost to befriend him. From what Mr. Cruickshank had told him, as well as from the samples of his pen

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

which he had examined he could augur well for his future in journalism.

"Since last I wrote," he proceeded, "I have heard of what may possibly turn out to your advantage. A man I know slightly has started business as a publisher in Paternoster Row, and you might find a post with him. He appears to be an enterprising fellow, for they say he means to start a new paper. If you like to call on him, I'll give you a note of introduction. It's always worth trying."

To this proposal Colin readily assented, and that same day saw him struggling through the fog on his way to Paternoster Row—that Mecca of scribes and publishers. Threading its narrow thoroughfares, filled with huge waggons and bustling crowds, and gazing bewildered at the great dingy warehouses on either side, Colin's reflections busied themselves not so much with the present as with the past, and visions of the world-renowned men who had frequented those same precincts in bygone days rose before him with realistic vividness. One scene after another presented itself from the brilliant series of the Georgian period, rekindling in his soul those daring ambitions that neither reason nor prudence can arrest. To him those surroundings had a fascination so powerful, that for the nonce he almost forgot his errand.

Arrived at his destination, he was informed that Mr. Sharp was engaged and would probably be for some time longer. Whereupon Colin requested the clerk to hand him the letter of introduction, with an enquiry whether Mr. Sharp would appoint an hour for an interview.

Presently the messenger returned with the

WIDENING HORIZONS

announcement that if Mr. Munro would call again at ten o'clock next morning, Mr. Sharp would be pleased to see him.

Punctually to a minute Colin presented himself at the publishing office, and was ushered by the same individual into Mr. Sharp's presence.

Seated at a massive desk covered with a heap of correspondence, that gentleman had all the air of dignity and importance which Colin had been wont to associate with an editor, and he could not but contrast him with his friend of "The Advertiser." Indeed, so disconcerting was the difference between the two men, that he felt abashed and uncomfortable.

Mr. Sharp was attired in a suit that bespoke sartorial skill of the first degree. Spotless linen, a voluminous cravat adorned with a brilliant pin, accorded well with the elegance of his dress.

In person he was rather tall and slim. His face was of a uniform paleness, and clean shaven but for his moustache, which, like his sleek hair, was coal black, and intensified by contrast the pallor of his skin. Dark, quick glancing eyes and an aquiline nose completed the portrait of a striking countenance.

His manner, as he rose to receive his visitor, was bland and condescending, and although his first look of inspection betrayed a disagreeable surprise, he hastened to conceal the impression, and entered at once into the subject of Colin's visit.

With reassuring frankness he told him that he had given due attention to Mr. Hopkin's letter of introduction, and had read the extracts from his contributions to "The Advertiser" with considerable interest. He quite endorsed the favourable

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

verdict of his correspondent, and would have had no scruple in assigning him a post in his establishment had there been a vacancy, but at present there was none.

Hereupon Colin summoned courage to introduce the subject of the contemplated periodical, about which he had been informed by Mr. Hopkins. Mr. Sharp testified some surprise, and appeared not altogether pleased at the mention of that project.

"Such a thing has indeed been mooted," he said, "though for the present it remained merely an idea. To start a new publication was no light undertaking, and required larger capital than he possessed, nor, if he did, would he be disposed to embark on such a venture. He might, of course, consider it, should some one agree to share the risk, but that was not likely—and now," he interrupted himself, "I must ask you to pardon an unceremonious dismissal, as my time, especially at this hour of the day, is precious."

"Then you can hold out no prospect of employment for me here?" asked Colin.

"Not at present," was the answer, "but I shall keep your name before me, should a vacancy occur. What is your address, by-the-bye?"

Colin informed him that he had not any fixed residence in the city, and begged permission to call again; which being granted, he took his leave with rather a heavy heart.

Notwithstanding the encouragement that had been given him he began to repent of having relinquished his work in Edinburgh, and felt glad that the step was not irretrievable: he could still rely on his friends there, whose welcome had been assured him should he return. All the more

WIDENING HORIZONS

agreeable seemed such a contingency, when contrasted with his present friendlessness; for already the chill that freezes the alien's heart had begun to affect him. Where is the man or woman who has known what it means to be alone in London that will not pity such as he?

Nevertheless hope is strong in the youthful breast, and can be blind to much that would otherwise daunt its daring; and though the experiences of his first day in great Babylon had proved far from encouraging, Colin's Celtic blood flowed too fast and strong in his veins for him to accept defeat so early in the struggle; and that evening, as he reviewed all that had transpired, especially the remark made to him by Mr. Sharp anent the contemplated journal, schemes both bold and romantic began to form themselves in his mind which were destined to have a determining influence in shaping his destiny.

CHAPTER XVI.

BROTHERS.

To anyone whose life has been spent in remote country districts a first visit to London is an epoch momentous in its influence either for good or ill. To the young Highlander it was an outstanding event in his history. The immensity, the bewildering contrasts, the mysteriousness, the rushing tide of human beings—all burst upon him with the overwhelming effect of an utterly novel experience. On that tumultuous ocean of life he felt himself but driftwood, and the sensation of nothingness, combined with his own self-depreciation, oppressed him. He realized that, should he drop down dead on the street, the tide of humanity would flow on with scarce a ripple on its surface. And yet each unit in that vast crowd constituted a world in itself. A sense of solemnity, as he surveyed the surging mass, took possession of him, filling his mind with deep thoughts. The bridge of Mirzah, so impressively portrayed in Addison's pages, recurred to memory. Yes, each individual among that moving mass was on his or her way to "that undiscovered country, from whose bourn no traveller returns."

Uncertain whether his sojourn in the city would be long or short, and having no other mode of occupying the time on his hands, he resolved to utilize it in visiting the world-renowned resorts that have attracted visitors for generations. On this winter morning, bright though cold, he was making his way to the great treasure-house that holds some of the wonders of the world—the

BROTHERS

British Museum—piloting his way as best he could among the seemingly endless streets, when in Piccadilly his attention was arrested by a group of three young men coming from the opposite direction. They were laughing merrily and talking with great animation. Colin halted, and stood as if rooted to the spot, for in one of them he recognized his brother. Yes, even in a far denser crowd he would have known that tall, lithe figure and the handsome face of Hamish.

The three men advanced, and with a start of utter astonishment Hamish saw his brother standing motionless there, as much taken aback as Colin himself. The gay smile died out of his face, and a look of something like consternation replaced it. In a moment he too stopped, and with a few whispered words to his companions, who cast looks of puzzled curiosity at Colin, he waved them adieu, and joined his brother.

“Where on earth did you come from, Colin?” were his first words. “What brings you here?”

Despite his attempt to appear natural and unembarrassed, Hamish betrayed unmistakable confusion of manner, and the constrained smile evoked no answering smile from his brother, upon whose heart a feeling of painful estrangement was falling, chilling every spontaneous emotion. Was this gay youth the brother with whom he had played in childhood's days in the manse garden? It seemed impossible to realize it, and the subtle change in his whole demeanour repelled the feelings of brotherly familiarity that would fain have given themselves utterance.

“I came on Tuesday, Hamish,” he replied, in response to his brother's query, “to see if I can get a post anywhere.”

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

"I thought you had got a pretty good one in Edinburgh," said Hamish, "Why did you leave it?"

"I was advised to come to London by the editor of 'The Advertiser,'" answered Colin. "He thought I might find a better opening in London."

"You were a fool to take his advice," was his brother's comment. "London isn't the place for anyone who needs a friend. It's every one for himself here, I assure you. But, I say, don't let us try to talk in this din. Can you come and have a cup of coffee with me somewhere? You haven't an engagement, have you?"

Colin had none, and whatever his own feelings were, he felt he must avail himself of an opportunity that might not be his again of coming to an understanding with his brother. Accordingly he at once acquiesced to the proposal, and both set out together in quest of the nearest coffee-house.

As they proceeded down the street, Colin soon perceived that several eyes were directed in a very conspicuous manner to his brother's face, as though they recognized him. At first he attributed this to his handsome appearance, but soon the true explanation occurred to him, that in Hamish they discovered the young actor whose performances were nightly evoking plaudits from admiring thousands. It was a relief, therefore, when they reached a refuge from the crowd, and found themselves seated at a small table, sipping steaming coffee, and free to converse on the subjects that so nearly concerned them both.

Conversation would have lagged, however, had it depended on Colin; for, though, to use the expressive phrase of Scripture, his "heart burned within him" to speak the thoughts surging there,

BROTHERS

a painful constraint kept him silent. An invisible barrier of reserve separated him from this brother, in whom a deep and all-pervading change had removed him far from all the familiar associations of former days.

Whether apprehensive or not of the turn the conversation might take, Hamish at once launched into what he considered a safe topic.

"It was good in uncle Murdo to remember us all so handsomely in his will," he said. "I never expected such a windfall. I'm glad father will now be better off and independent of his beggarly stipend. It will be a boon to you too, Colin, for, as far as I can learn, you've chosen a line of life that won't bring much grist to your mill. Why didn't you go in for the ministry, and make up for my defalcation?"

"If I had had your physical fitness for it, I might," was Colin's pointed answer, "even for father's sake, to make some compensation for his disappointment about you."

"I expected that hit," said Hamish, his brow contracting; "but it's no use casting that up to me. I never could have been a minister, and I have chosen the profession I was fitted for, as the event has proved, and wouldn't give it up for an archbishopric or to be Prime Minister of the kingdom. And I hope to be able to disprove father's prejudice against it, and show him that he has no need to be ashamed of his son, even though he treads the stage."

The tone of unalterable resolve in which these words were spoken made further discussion on the subject useless, and Colin attempted no reply. An awkward pause ensued, which lasted for a few painful moments ere Hamish broke it with an

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

enquiry for his mother and sister, which Colin briefly answered, for the calm insensibility it displayed to the misery which Hamish knew he had brought upon that home stung his brother to the quick, and feelings of strong resentment were springing up within him.

There was silence again between them till with some perceptible confusion Hamish said:

"They don't give me much news of the folks at Achnacairn when they write. I suppose so black a sheep as I am cannot be thought to have any interest left in former friends. I think Kitty at least might have something to say about her friend, Joanna Sinclair."

This tentative remark was fully understood by Colin, and the rising colour on his brother's face betrayed what he had not ventured to express.

"Joanna is governess with a family in Edinburgh," he replied.

The start of dismay produced by these words defied concealment, as Hamish fixed a gaze of acute apprehension on his brother's face.

"A governess?" he exclaimed. "Joanna Sinclair a governess? What do you mean?"

"Since you appear to know nothing about it, I may as well tell you," returned Colin. "Her father wished her to marry Sir Hector Forbes, who proposed to her, and, I hear, was desperately in love with her, but she wouldn't have him, and Mr. Sinclair turned her out of the house in his rage."

"Turned his only child out of the house?"

"Yes, or perhaps it would be more correct to say she saved him the trouble, for she ran away and took refuge with her aunt in Edinburgh. She asked me to help her to get a situation, and by good fortune I did, with a family who value her and treat her kindly."

BROTHERS

“What a brute that man is! I wish ——”

A flush of anger suffused Hamish Munro's cheek as this exclamation broke from him — the first hopeful symptom his brother had detected in him. He hailed it with secret joy, for it seemed to indicate that the old Hamish was not wholly dead. His face assumed a serious, remorseful look, and he relapsed into moody silence, from which the striking of a clock recalled him, and abruptly rising, he said:

“I must leave you Colin, for I am due for rehearsal at the Haymarket within half-an-hour. Will you walk along with me?”

Colin assented, and they set out. As they approached the theatre, Hamish stopped, and resuming his new air of gaiety, said:

“I suppose there's no use asking you to come and see me in ‘The Merchant of Venice’?”

Colin shook his head, and grasping his brother's hand, replied:

“No, Hamish! I would rather see you anywhere else.”

The actor smiled, waved his hand, and disappeared within the theatre, just as a group of other actors and actresses arrived on the scene.

London and its wonders had now lost their charm for Colin Munro, and even the British Museum had no longer power to please him during the hours he spent among its precious archives and mysteries. The recent interview had revealed to him how completely lost to them all was the brother who had been the pride of the family.

Are there any pangs the human heart is capable of feeling more poignant than that experienced on finding in a once familiar friend a stranger?

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

CHAPTER XVII.

COLIN MUNRO'S VENTURE.

DAYS were passing without bringing any nearer the realization of the hope on the strength of which Colin had come to London, which he had already found to be a very expensive domicile. He had called more than once at "The Times" office in quest of encouragement; but although his friend there still spoke hopefully of his prospects, his present position was precarious. Unless some definite assurance of employment were forthcoming soon, he would be forced to return to his work in Edinburgh, or lose it altogether.

He had not paid another visit to Paternoster Row, but now, as a last resort, he resolved to do so, the fortnight for which he had stipulated having nearly expired.

Mr. Sharp received him most affably, and while unable to hold out any prospect of immediate assistance, spoke encouragingly of opportunities that *might* occur of doing so.

The emphasis on that single word whetted Colin's curiosity, and he promptly enquired whether the project of the new journal had advanced any stage nearer its realization.

A sudden gleam of interest darted from those dark, searching eyes at this query, as with an air of resignation the publisher expressed his regret that the capital required was not forthcoming, so that he had been obliged reluctantly to abandon the idea.

COLIN MUNRO'S VENTURE

"What capital would be necessary?" enquired Colin.

"Oh, well that's a difficult point to decide," was the reply as, with his shifting eye still watching his companion's face, he appeared to be lost in calculation. "As far as I can approximately reckon," he continued, "I should say three thousand pounds at least, to start the concern."

"But I understood that you intended to furnish part of the capital," rejoined Colin.

"Certainly," assented Mr. Sharp.

"Then do you consider the prospects of success enough to justify such a venture?" was Colin's next query.

"Well, unless I had thought so, I would scarcely have entertained the idea," answered the publisher with a smile. "Of course, as you know, 'Tis not in mortals to command success,' etc."

There was a pause, during which the intending voyager on the perilous sea of literature seemed to be cogitating deeply, while his companion eyed him intently. Presently Colin broke it with the abrupt remark:

"Suppose I were able to provide two thousand pounds, would that sum be enough to start the journal?"

"I believe it might," assented Mr. Sharp.

"And you would consider me capable of the editorship?"

"From the specimens of your work I have seen, as well as from the success you have already had on the Edinburgh paper, I should reckon you fully capable of that position."

"Then you believe I would be justified in taking this step? Because I must inform you that the sum I have mentioned is all I possess."

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

"I cannot undertake to speak positively as to that. The venture might possibly turn out unfavourably for us, but, as far as I can see, the chances are on our side. However, you had better take time to weigh the matter: there's no necessity for an immediate decision. If you do take the risk, it must be clearly understood that you do so entirely on your own responsibility."

"That is only fair, Mr. Sharp. I will give the matter due consideration, and let you know my decision in the course of a day or two. And now, as I see your clerk wishes to speak with you, I'll take my leave. Good afternoon."

As Colin passed through the central department of the establishment, the scene of activity there indicated pretty convincingly that the enterprising publisher was prospering, for every one in the place was bustling about, as if unable to overtake all the pressing business on hand. It looked encouraging for him.

Excited as he was with the result of this interview, the importance of which weighed upon him more and more, he sought relief in rapid exercise, and when he reached the noisy thoroughfare outside, he set off at a quick trot without any destination in view, until finding himself in the vicinity of Playhouse Yard, he suddenly determined to seek Mr. Hopkins and tell him what had transpired that afternoon.

That gentleman listened with earnest attention, but did not receive the communication with the ready acquiescence which Colin had expected.

"It's a big risk," he remarked, "and for my part I don't think you should run it. Sharp is a smart enough fellow, I grant, and already he has got a pretty sure footing in the trade. And no

COLIN MUNRO'S VENTURE

doubt for his own credit, independent of your interest altogether, if he started this paper, he would leave no stone unturned to score a success; but success isn't always to be got by the cleverest man that ever lived, and if the worst happened, what becomes of you? He has his own business pretty well secured to him, but you would be stranded. It seems to me the risk is all on your side, and if I were in your place, I would tell him so before compromising yourself in the matter."

Considerably crestfallen, Colin said:

"But you appeared to approve of the venture when you first mentioned it to me, Mr. Hopkins."

"Yes, I did," was the reply: "but I never reckoned that it was to be at your risk: all I counted on was that, if Sharp did start the paper, you would get a post on it either as contributor or editor. This is outside my calculation altogether."

Sore distracted by the divergent views of the two men whom he had that day consulted, and wholly unsophisticated as he was in the ways of the world, Colin knew not which adviser to follow; but the strong commonsense Mr. Hopkins had shown had its effect in determining him to represent the matter in this light to Mr. Sharp.

"Don't commit yourself," said his friendly counsellor, as he bade him goodbye, "without letting me know first. And, mind you, if you do make this venture—though I hope you won't—get a legal agreement made, so that you'll know where you stand with Sharp."

When, accordingly, next day Colin put the matter before his prospective partner in business, that gentleman appeared considerably taken

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

aback, but merely remarked that the first thing to be considered was whether Colin intended to proceed in the matter or not.

In reply Colin informed him that, if there was any substantial ground to warrant the enterprise, he was prepared to undertake it. Mr. Sharp thereupon assured him that he believed there was, and that on his part, at least, no effort would be spared to ensure success. His business connexion was large, and increasing every day, and already he numbered among his clients several men and women of note in the literary world, upon whose co-operation he could rely. As for Colin himself, he had given good proof that he was capable of the position he would have as editor of "*The Helicon*"—the title that had suggested itself to him as appropriate in the case of a high-class periodical such as this promised to be. He added that, if authorship was his goal, this would be a unique opportunity of introducing himself to the public.

This encouraging representation availed to dissipate the lingering misgivings in Colin's mind, and, swayed by the reflection, "nothing venture, nothing win," he at last decided to make this venture.

The practical publisher then with cheering zest threw himself into business details, discussing with astonishing precision the necessary arrangements for the momentous project, as if all had been already settled. There should be a joint account at the Bank, and while Colin devoted himself to his share of the work as editor, Mr. Sharp would proceed with his.

And proceed he did with an energy and expedition that amazed Colin, as day after day he

COLIN MUNRO'S VENTURE

observed the increased activities in the publishing house, which seemed to presage prosperity.

On his side, correspondence with the celebrities whose services Mr. Sharp had enlisted, multiplied overwhelmingly, while the introductions he sought and obtained to other promising contributors absorbed every hour of the day and often many of the night. As for his own contributions to the forthcoming journal, his intense desire to produce something that would enhance its reputation had reached a fever point. As long, however, as those exertions were confined to correspondence by letter, they presented no formidable difficulty; but when it became necessary to call personally on men and women whose names were of world-wide celebrity, his courage faltered and his inherent self-depreciation made such interviews veritable ordeals to him. No such test of his powers of endurance had ever been experienced, and the morbid dread of the contempt evoked by his personal defects proved slow torture as he sought the presence of those exalted personages, in comparison with whom he felt himself to be a mere nonentity.

He had contemplated a brief visit to Scotland, in order to make final arrangements with his pupils there, and also to visit his parents and disclose to them his grand project; but the speed with which Mr. Sharp was conducting operations, and his evident assumption that the editor should be no less expeditious, made such a delay impossible. Those matters, accordingly, had to be settled by correspondence; and it was with genuine regret that the tutor received from his pupils those touching tributes to his helpful services, and bade them all farewell.

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

But that chapter in his life's history had permanently closed, and one that promised to be vastly more momentous was opening. What would its record be? That question occupied all his attention now. He had staked everything on this venture, and a feverish eagerness possessed him to gain success, despite the obstacles and disappointments that otherwise would have daunted and maimed his endeavours. Notwithstanding his inexperience, moreover, he had already discovered that Mr. Sharp was quite prepared to treat him as a subordinate, and take the reins out of his hands, if allowed, and he wisely resolved to thwart that intent.

In this decision he found assistance in a quarter where he least expected it. He had applied to an authoress whose works had won for her a premier place in literature, for permission to include her name in the list of contributors to the new publication. A most courteous reply, in which that lady expressed her interest in his undertaking, led to further correspondence. The permission he sought was graciously given, and to his infinite surprise, an invitation to call upon her followed, in order to discuss certain matters connected with her promised contributions to "*The Helicon*." Had the giver of that invitation been present when her letter was opened, she would have been at a loss to comprehend his action, for with a flushed cheek and agitated air he walked to the mirror in his room, studied its reflection, and then, throwing himself down in an armchair, leant back his head and almost groaned.

"How can I go?" he muttered under his breath. "What will she think of me when she sees me? Any favourable impression my letters may have

COLIN MUNRO'S VENTURE

produced will be destroyed by my hideous appearance. If she's like other women, she'll scorn and dislike me, and perhaps withdraw her promised help."

Ah, but he was yet to learn that she was not like other women.

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BIRD AND THE SNARE.

THERE is an exhilaration in mere novelty that quickens energy and lends a zest to enterprise of any sort. A new chapter had opened in the life of Colin Munro, fraught with ambitions and hopes to which hitherto he had been a total stranger; of which, indeed, he had never dreamt in the boldest flights of his imagination. Amid the whirl of business in which he now found himself, and the intensity of his desire to succeed in a venture involving issues vital to him, he seemed at times to be going through the transactions of some wild dream: it all appeared so unreal. That he, who all his life had been noted for diffidence and self-depreciation, and who invariably had courted obscurity, should now be figuring in public life as the conductor of a magazine, was a veritable paradox, at which no one could have been more astonished than he himself was.

Had his exertions been restricted to purely literary or business affairs, the task would have been comparatively easy; but when it necessitated interviews with distinguished persons, this was an ordeal from which he shrank, as only those possessed of a hyper-sensitive nature can comprehend.

The day fixed for his visit to the august personage mentioned in the previous chapter had

THE BIRD AND THE SNARE

come, and, painfully nervous, he was at last making his way to her residence—an unpretentious one as far as its exterior was concerned. Nor, when admitted, was there anything in its general aspect more formidable or calculated to overawe the visitor. The comfortable sitting-room into which he was ushered was plainly though tastefully furnished.

He had little leisure, however, for further inspection, as presently the door gently opened, and Mrs. — presented herself.

She was a woman of noble presence. The widow's cap that concealed her white hair lent a sort of regal grace to her appearance. Sorrow had written its record all too plainly on that fine face, and seemed still to vibrate in the tones of her voice, which was soft and musical, and in keeping with her subdued manner and gentle movements.

In that first moment of introduction all Colin's preconceptions of this gifted woman were shattered. Instead of the stateliness and that subtle air of distinction conferred by genuine greatness of any sort which he had associated with her, he found a homeliness and simplicity that disarmed his apprehensions and almost set him at ease. Doubtless she saw at a glance his shyness and confusion, and her shrewd discernment early enlightened her as to the character of her visitor. The consideration she showed for this tyro in literature, and the delicate tact with which she sought to remove his diffidence; the absence of that professional stiffness which many authors seem unable to discard, thawed Colin's reserve as effectually as sunshine ice. So naturally, indeed, she unbended, that he forgot the genius in the

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

kindly, motherly woman. There was something reassuring in the very way in which she extended her hand, and then, pointing to a chair, bade him be seated. And in order to relieve his embarrassment, which was still painfully evident, she opened the conversation at once by enquiring when "The Helicon" was to appear.

Conquering his nervousness as best he could, Colin answered the query, which was followed by others relative to the new publication, and the authoress listened with unfeigned interest while he supplied the desired information and went on to disclose the modest expectations he entertained as to its success.

When he ended, she astonished him by saying: "Pardon me, Mr. Munro, for the remark, but you must be a bold man to think of starting a new magazine in London."

Colin smiled, disclaiming the tribute, and assuring her that his fears far exceeded his courage.

Another frank enquiry as to his publisher elicited additional details, which appeared to impress his kind patroness, who said she knew nothing of Mr. Sharp, but no doubt Mr. Munro had come to satisfactory terms with him as to the management of the new periodical. But as Colin's reply did not satisfy her, she strongly urged him to have a legal contract drawn up at once.

Then followed enquiries as to the address to which MSS. should be sent, and terms and date of remuneration, etc. With all the young editor's answers Mrs. — declared herself satisfied, and when he rose to take his leave, she expressed her wish for the success of the undertaking with a

THE BIRD AND THE SNARE

cordiality that encouraged him as nothing else had yet done. He would have liked to kiss the hand she placed in his, so warm was the feeling of gratitude in his heart for a kindness so far beyond any he had dared to look for. It was difficult for him to realize that he had been talking freely and in the most friendly fashion with one whose name was indelibly inscribed on the page of Fame. Nay, more: in this great literary artist he had found a friend whose goodness of heart was presently to manifest itself in deeds of help throughout the days of adversity that lay before him.

As yet the storm was not visible on the horizon: it was from out the blue that the bolt was to fall which was to shatter the fair but frail fabric reared at such cost to the builder.

The days that succeeded this memorable interview were so fully occupied with preparations for the appearance of "*The Helicon*," that the distracted editor would have forgotten the injunction given him by his friend of "*The Times*" and so emphatically reinforced by Mrs. —; and all the more readily as Mr. Sharp professed himself too busy to attend to so trifling a matter as a legal agreement. That it was no trifle, however, Colin was now convinced, and the urgency of his request that their relations as proprietor and publisher should be made legally clear at last prevailed upon Mr. Sharp to assent. Although, he said, it was merely a matter of form, he would get the agreement drawn out by a lawyer of his acquaintance, and have it ready for Mr. Munro's signature next day.

Accordingly, when Colin called for it, a formidable looking document was presented to him, with a reassuring smile and careless air, to

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

glance over and sign. A few minutes would suffice, and then both he and his partner would be free to give their undivided attention to the great project on hand.

Unfolding the stiff parchment, Colin glanced over the close-written pages, astonished that the simple matter which gave so little concern to Mr. Sharp should have required so many words to make it plain. Even his cursory survey of the contents convinced him that something more than a few minutes would be required to master them. But when he expressed this opinion, a shade of annoyance was visible on that gentleman's face; which still more determined Colin to scrutinize them carefully before appending his signature; and he quietly announced that he would take the document to his quarters and peruse it there at leisure.

Despite the suave air of assent, Colin was shrewd enough to detect the disagreeable surprise which this intimation had occasioned his publisher, and strange misgivings began to ferment in his mind, which strengthened when, tracing through a labyrinth of legal phraseology certain definite facts, he came to the conclusion that, while by this deed the publisher's interests were thoroughly safeguarded, his own were left in a somewhat precarious position. Yet, so entirely unsophisticated was he in the ways of the world, that he resolved to consult one whom he knew to be as thoroughly initiated.

Accordingly he repaired to Playhouse Yard, and requested an interview with Mr. Hopkins, who presently appeared, and seeing the folded parchment in Colin's hands, at once assumed what it was.

THE BIRD AND THE SNARE

"Ah, at last!" he said. "Do you want me to read it?"

Colin assented, and his friend, unfolding it, cast a keen, rapid glance over its pages, then refolding it, said:

"There's a good deal to be studied here, sir. Can you leave it with me till to-morrow?"

"Certainly," replied Colin. "When can I have it back again?"

"To-morrow at nine o'clock," was the reply.

Precisely at that hour Colin was on the spot. The peculiar expression of his friend's face arrested his attention, as, taking him aside, he said with a sarcastic smile, and pointing to the agreement:

"This is an interesting piece of work."

"What do you mean?" asked Colin.

"It's a case of 'heads, I win; tails, you lose,' " was the disconcerting answer.

Colin's face fell, for, although his perusal of the deed had led him to the same conclusion, this confirmation of his worst fears dismayed him.

"Has Sharp any control of your money?" was the next query.

"Yes, we have a joint account at the bank," replied Colin.

"Man, what were you thinking of to agree to that?" cried Mr. Hopkins, almost fiercely.

"He proposed it, and I believed him a man of honour," said the disillusioned victim.

"You made a big mistake, sir, and one that it's now too late, I'm afraid, to correct. But I'll tell you what to do: take this to a lawyer at once, and put the whole case into his hands."

"I know no lawyer in London: do you?"

"Yes, I'll give you his address. There, go to

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

Messrs. Templeton and Arkwright. I know Templeton well, and if it's possible to get you out of this fix, he's the man to do it. When did you say 'The Helicon' was to come out?"

"To-morrow week."

"There may be time yet. I wish you success."

With these ominous words in his ears, Colin set out in quest of the address given, his excitement increasing every moment. Bitter regret for his own misplaced confidence filled his mind, and the fear that he had already compromised himself with Mr. Sharp too far to undo the mischief oppressed him so overwhelmingly that all confidence and clearness of thought forsook him. Could it really be the case that he had ruined his own prospects by sheer neglect of ordinary precautions?

Truly, there are no troubles so grievous as those we bring upon ourselves, for in them there is the venom of remorse.

Yet amid his vain regrets and self-accusation Colin had one source of consolation: no one but himself would suffer from his improvidence and over-trustfulness.

Uncertainty as to his position was speedily removed. The lawyer's verdict endorsed Mr. Hopkins'. His examination of the deed, made in Colin's presence, engrossed him closely for some time, and when he laid it down on his desk, his face betrayed his verdict before he uttered it.

"I have drawn up many contracts in my time," he declared, "but never one so completely one-sided as this. How long have you been associated with Mr. Sharp?"

Colin proceeded to give his story in a few brief sentences, keeping back nothing pertinent to the case, and with a frankness and simplicity that

THE BIRD AND THE SNARE

evidently impressed the listener, who regarded him with a look of compassion quite foreign to his client's conception of men of his profession.

"I'm afraid this fellow has been too clever for you, Mr. Munro," he remarked. "His plan is a charmingly simple one: namely, to start a new periodical, which would be an effective advertisement for him, with your capital, and, when that is expended, as I fear it must be, he will throw you overboard, and carry on the enterprise himself."

Prepared in a manner though he had been for it, this blunt statement of the disastrous truth stunned poor Colin, and his attempt to conceal his agitation could not deceive the shrewd lawyer, who really compassionated this victim of an unscrupulous swindler.

"You say you repeatedly asked Mr. Sharp to get an agreement drawn out?" he enquired.

"Yes, several times," assented Colin.

"And did you never suspect that he was deliberately putting it off?"

"No; he seemed to be so thoroughly intent on making a success of the venture, and was so overwhelmed with business that I believed it was all right."

"Does he know you are consulting me?"

"No; it was only yesterday that I got the agreement from him."

"Then you had better inform him at once, and I'll request him to call here and discuss the case with me. If he chooses to listen to reason and come to ordinarily decent terms, something may be done to save you; if not, the alternative is a law suit, which might entail more than you have evidently lost; and I am convinced that, if you did undertake to prosecute, the verdict would go

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

against you. Morally your case is strong, but legally it is weak. Sharp has managed the business so well that you have no hold on him whatever. It is as clear as daylight that he meant to profit by your ignorance to promote his own advantage."

This perfectly truthful presentment of the case left Colin without a reply. Trifling incidents, scarcely noticed at the time, began to recur to memory, invested now with a significance that confirmed the lawyer's opinion, and rendered his predicament hopeless.

"Then what do you advise me to do?" he asked, both voice and looks lending pathetic eloquence to the question.

"You can do nothing in the meantime until I have seen Mr. Sharp," answered Mr. Templeton. "As I said, all depends on whether he is prepared to act a less dishonourable part toward you. I suppose," he asked abruptly, "you have no friend who would support you financially if you chose to fight the case?"

Colin shook his head.

"My reason for asking," explained Mr. Templeton, "is that, if some influential person had been prepared to back you, the fear of a prosecution might compel Sharp to come to a reasonable settlement rather than risk the loss of his reputation which a lawsuit would certainly entail."

"Even if I had such a friend," replied Colin, "I would not allow him to stake his money on such a chance. My sole consolation is that no one will suffer but myself. I can face the worst, for I have a clear conscience, and would not be in Mr. Sharp's place for ten times the money I have lost."

THE BIRD AND THE SNARE

The lawyer regarded him with a curiously significant expression, but merely said:

“You shall hear from me after I have seen Mr. Sharp. Let me have your address, please.”

Colin pencilled it on a piece of paper, and bade his advocate adieu, wondering what the issue of that impending conference would be.

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

CHAPTER XIX.

THE STORM.

THE announcement of a new competitor in the field of journalistic literature had excited some curiosity in Paternoster Row and beyond it. Speculation was rife as to its claims on public support and its clientele, and divergent predictions as to its prospects were heard in various quarters. Judging from the activity displayed by the agencies connected with it, success seemed pretty well assured. The day of publication had been intimated some time in advance, and at last the first issue of "The Helicon" was in the hands of news-agents and readers. The list of contributors to its pages embraced several names of world-wide fame, and therefore sure to command a ready reception for the new magazine.

With an intensity of interest which only those engaged in some high venture can understand, the editor watched the launching of his frail craft on the perilous sea of literature, strewn with so many wrecks, hoping for the favourable *aura popularis* that would carry it to the "Fair Havens" of success.

Very different, however, were his anticipations now from what they had been a short time before. In accordance with Mr. Templeton's advice, he had informed Mr. Sharp of his interview with that gentleman, and the palpable consternation produced in the publisher's face and demeanour by the announcement convinced Colin that his

THE STORM

apprehensions were but too well founded. Mr. Sharp almost gasped with dismay, and his face pallid as it always was, grew livid.

"Do you think this is a fair way to treat me?" he demanded. "What occasion had you to resort to a lawyer, when you could have discussed the agreement with me in a friendly way, and I would have explained any difficulty you had in regard to it?"

"I found when I studied it, Mr. Sharp," answered Colin, "that it was so utterly one-sided, that I could not sign it; and I took the only course open to me by seeking legal advice. As you know, I asked you again and again to have an agreement drawn out in justice to myself, since, from the one you have now given me, it is clear that the risk is practically all mine. Had you put such an agreement into my hands at the beginning of our negotiations, I would have proceeded no futher in the business."

"Very well, Mr. Munro, since you have made this a law case, I will follow your example and take legal advice," declared Mr. Sharp; and the vindictive expression of his face satisfied his victim that he might expect all that malignity could do in revenge for his unlooked for resistance to the plot laid for his ruin. Rather, however, than proceed to extremities and provoke hostility that must redound to his own loss, Colin merely urged compromise.

"You are entitled to do so, Mr. Sharp," he said in answer to this threat; "and I trust you will see it to be for your own advantage to agree to more reasonable terms, so that this venture may not come to grief, but prove profitable both to you and me."

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

Mr. Sharp's smile augured ill for such a consummation, and Colin took leave of him with strengthened misgivings.

Two days afterwards he received a note from Mr. Templeton, requesting him to call, and was informed that the interview between himself and the publisher had taken place, with the anticipated result.

"It's a sorry business, sir," commented the lawyer, after recounting his conversation with Mr. Sharp. "You little knew the man you had to deal with when you entrusted yourself to Mr. Sharp. He has succeeded only too well in his neat little scheme for his own profit: you are powerless to outdo him. Even if you had been in a position to fight him in the law courts, the verdict would have gone against you. I mentioned the possibility of a prosecution in such a way as to cause him some slight discomfort; for he well knows that, even if he won his case, the exposure of his roguery which would inevitably be made by such a trial would ruin his prospects as a publisher. But for that apprehension you would have found no mercy at his hands. As it is, even the small relaxation he has made in his rascally demands is merely a pretext for ultimate revenge for your exposure of his infamy. I warn you to expect nothing else, for I read the man's character like a book."

"A pleasant outlook for me!" said Colin with a rueful smile.

"Yes; I am truly sorry for you, Mr. Munro," replied the lawyer. "You are learning the hard lesson all of us must learn in time, that 'Man, when smoothest he appears, he most to be suspected.' All you can do in the meantime is to keep a sharp lookout on your bank-account, and

THE STORM

demand full particulars of expenditure. I am at your service for any further emergency."

The unlucky client thanked his adviser, and requested to know his fee, which proved so modest that he offered to augment it; but to this the lawyer would not agree, and they parted on more friendly terms than the parties in such transactions usually do.

Only too soon Mr. Templeton's shrewd prediction was fulfilled. The restless energy that had characterised all the preparatory arrangements for the publication of "*The Helicon*" seemed suddenly to languish. The enquiries which its editor made as to sales, etc., elicited no satisfactory information: on the contrary, those most responsible for the practical department of publication betrayed a reticence that puzzled and discomfited him. A marked change was observable on every hand, the explanation of which he surmised; though a few months were yet to elapse before his conviction was confirmed.

Meanwhile, with redoubled energy he applied himself to his task, determined that no effort on his part should be lacking to promote the success of the new periodical. Nor was he disappointed, as far as its literary reputation was concerned, for the unanimous voice of the press acclaimed the merits of "*The Helicon*" in no stinted terms. To its editor this was peculiarly gratifying and stimulated him to fresh exertions to justify the commendation his work had won. Busy hours were those spent in that office situated in the heart of London's stir and traffic, where, without assistance of any sort, he devoted all his mental resources to the worthy accomplishment of the onerous task of pleasing a fickle public, far more

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

appreciative of the superficial, the frivolous, the amusing than of sterling excellence or intellectual power in any form. From the ideal he had set before himself at the first he never swerved despite the representations made to him by caterers for cheap popularity to lower the tone of the magazine and provide what the public most relished. That nothing unworthy should soil the pages of "The Helicon" was his fixed purpose, nor was it relinquished when ruin stared him in the face.

Already it appeared near at hand from certain significant incidents which he recognized as premonitions. More than once he had received friendly cautions from his distinguished contributor, Mrs. —, whose interest in the journal continued as active as ever, and he had been her guest on several occasions, and treated with a courtesy and cordiality deeply gratifying to one of his shy temperament. It was but natural, therefore, that in his present straits he should bethink himself of this genuine benefactress, and accordingly he resolved to lay his case before her, assured of her sympathy and help.

Nor was he disappointed. She listened attentively to his story, evincing an interest that led to an unreserved recital of his troubles and the disastrous result of his literary venture.

"This is no surprise to me, Mr. Munro," she remarked at the end of his disclosures. "Not long after your last visit a lady, envoy from your publisher called upon me with a view to securing the publication of a book I am engaged on. Her representation of things was not to your advantage, and unless I greatly mistook her, your publisher would willingly dispense with you and

THE STORM

put her in your place. The gist, indeed, of her communication was that, if the magazine were taken entirely out of your hands, its prospects would be much improved. I fear me you have got into the hands of an unscrupulous trickster, Mr. Munro. To me his design is perfectly clear, and your lawyer appears to take the same view of the case."

"You have rightly judged," assented Colin; "but there seems to be small chance of deliverance. I am prepared for the worst."

"And what is included in 'the worst'?" asked his friend.

"All, at least, in the way of money," he replied.

"That is melancholy indeed. Have you no rich relations who would be willing to assist you at a time like this?"

"None. My father would, I know, if I asked him, but I won't."

"Then you will be entirely dependent on your own exertions for a livelihood? You will find it hard, Mr. Munro, in this great selfish city, where so many are jostling one another in the race of life. I am trying to think how I can help you."

"You have already given me invaluable help, ma'am—help which I can never repay, but for which I can never cease to be grateful while I live."

"Oh, I must disclaim all thanks: it was a pleasure to assist a fellow-countryman. I only regret that you have not met with the success you deserve. Still there is no need to despair: you are young and have health and spirits on your side, and these are the greatest assets in life. Let me see now," she continued, "it seems to me I

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

could befriend you in one way: I can give you an introduction to a literary club where you would meet some of our celebrities, whose influence would stand you in good stead in your search for some post on the staff of a publishing house; since I infer this is what would suit you best."

Colin's feelings betrayed themselves in the flush that dyed his cheek, and in the painful effort he made to return an answer to this generous proposal.

"I cannot thank you, Mrs. —, as I would like to do," he said, "for your disinterested kindness, and if I felt justified in availing myself of so handsome an offer, I would only too willingly do so; but I have no claim to be among those clever people you mention."

"Oh yes," returned his benefactress, "you are the editor of a magazine that is your best advertisement, and one you may justly be proud of. As for the clever people you are afraid of, let me tell you, clever people are often very stupid people. I'm sure, after a fortnight of Miss — I feel disposed to go down and converse with my cook."

This unique view of the case drew a smile from her humble protégé—the first his face had worn for many a day, and Mrs. — seemed gratified to see it.

"Let the worst befall," he said, "I'll deem myself no loser, since I have won the approbation and goodwill of so gifted a lady as yourself."

"Oh, I am among the old fogies," was the reply: "you must try to find friends among the rising authors."

"I prefer the old ones," he said, with an emphasis that gave double point to the words.

THE STORM

“A truce to compliments, Mr. Munro,” she replied, “and let us return to business. You will not refuse my introduction to the club I mentioned?”

“I cannot refuse so handsome an offer,” he replied; “though I fear my presence in such high places will be as incongruous as a beggar’s at court.”

“We shall see,” said the lady, with a meaning smile. “For the present, let your publisher know that he has got to deal with one not to be trampled on or intimidated.”

“I’ll do my best, ma’am,” he promised; “but whatever may be the end of this business, your kindness to me will have my heart’s gratitude as long as it beats.”

As this great-souled woman looked into these honest eyes, she did not doubt it, and there was a yearning kindness in her own as she watched him depart that bore witness to her interest in the fate of the young, friendless Scotsman who had come up to London to fight his way through obstacles formidable enough to daunt much better equipped combatants.

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

CHAPTER XX.

SHIPWRECK.

EIGHT momentous months had passed since Colin's introduction to literary life in London. With their passing hope had steadily declined, for each successive report of the magazine was more disastrous than its predecessor. Enquiries elicited no satisfactory information from Mr. Sharp, whose callous indifference plainly indicated that his victim's ruin would awaken no compunction in that case-hardened conscience.

One morning on calling at the publishing office, Mr. Sharp coolly informed him that his capital was exhausted. Partly prepared as he was for the announcement, Colin for the moment was stunned, and regarded his betrayer with a look that would have stabbed a less hardened heart. He disdained, however, to show his feelings, and merely enquired:

"Indeed? Then what do you propose to do?"

"Oh, you know, the magazine must go on," was the calm reply: "our contracts with the printers, paper-makers, and binders cannot be cancelled: they were made for a year. Since you cannot continue it, I must do it myself; though at a loss I did not count upon when I agreed to your proposal."

"And I suppose it did not occur to you to give me warning of this a little sooner," returned Colin.

SHIPWRECK

"You knew the state of affairs as well as I did," retorted Mr. Sharp.

"On the contrary, any information I did obtain was by persistent enquiries, and never such as to satisfy me. However, I decline to discuss the matter further until I have seen my lawyer. Good morning."

Colin turned away with a parting look of righteous indignation and contempt, leaving his enemy to his conjectures as to what the next step in the proceedings would be.

"It would take a cleverer man than I can pretend to be to deal with such a scoundrel," was Mr. Templeton's comment when Colin related his interview with the publisher. "You know the old saw, Mr. Munro: 'They need a lang spoon wha sup kail wi' the de'il.' I'm heartily sorry for you, but it's beyond my power to help you. You've been thoroughly victimized, and unless I'm much mistaken, you're not his first or his last victim. But it's just such unscrupulous characters that succeed; and it won't surprise me if he prospers to his heart's content and drives a flourishing trade under the guise of straight dealing. I saw through his design from the beginning, and my forecast has been borne out to the letter. He started a new journal with your money, and after ruining you he is going to carry it on himself. It would not surprise me to find that his representation of the condition of things is false. However, as I told you, he has got the better of you on every hand, and you must face the fact with the best grace you can."

"I have resolved to do so," replied Colin. "They say Experience keeps a dear school, and when you learn the lesson, you must pay the

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

wages. This has been a costly lesson for me, but I trust I have profited by it. You may inform Mr. Sharp that our connexion is ended. He and I have met for the last time. And now, what do I owe you, Mr. Templeton, as this will be the final visit, I suppose, to you? I beg once more to thank you for your kind advice."

"I am loth to charge you any fee at all," said the lawyer. "I only wish it had been in my power to expose that unconscionable rogue. However, though he has profited so handsomely at your expense, he has not prevented you from gaining reputation as an editor. 'The Helicon' has been worthily praised by the press generally, and should be your best advertisement in seeking another post. I hope to see you reaping honours in literature that will far outweigh your present misfortune."

Colin thanked his friend for his good wishes, paid the modest fee for his advice, and took his departure with such feelings as the shipwrecked mariner may be supposed to experience as from the shore he watches the foundering of his vessel with all its cargo.

It was the time of the year when nature renews the beauty of this old world, and every, bourgeoning bough and opening bud speaks of resurrection. Already the first flush of exquisite verdure was on the trees, spring flowers were blooming in London's parks, and the blossoms on hawthorn and lilac scented the air. Only city-dwellers, perhaps, fully appreciate the delight of such things; and wise was the policy that saved from the encroachments of the speculative builder those sweet reminders of the country that have been aptly termed "the lungs of London."

SHIPWRECK

To escape from the rush and roar of the city was Colin's first impulse on this fateful day, and toward Hyde Park he bent his steps through the bustling crowds. To find a "quiet resting place" was just now his chief desire—some secluded spot where he could sit down and calmly review his recent experiences and look the present disaster in the face. The reaction from the excitement of that morning had begun, and as he more clearly realized the extent of his misfortune, little wonder that his heart sank and the cravings for solitude became importunate.

At last he found himself under the shade of a beech tree, with the balmy air fanning his aching brow, and the warbling of birds soothing and filling his mind with a delicious sense of peace and rest. Before him spread parterres stocked with hyacinths, tulips, and daffodils, attracting groups of happy children with their nurses. What a charming contrast it all was to the dingy purlieus of the city. How welcome was its quietude in contrast with the din of traffic. With a sigh of infinite relief he resigned himself to the charm of the scene, almost forgetting for the time the sharpness of his pain.

Presently a shrill cry awoke him from his reverie, and looking round, he saw a little girl, who had been trundling a hoop and had fallen. Like most children in similar accidents, she cried without restraint. Colin sprang forward to raise her from the ground, and at the same instant a gentlemen also came to the rescue. Although Colin had been the first to stretch out his hand to assist the little creature, she turned from him to her other rescuer, who set her on her feet and wiped her tear-soiled face, while a nurse who

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

had been philandering with a soldier at a little distance came running up and took possession of her charge.

At that moment Colin and the stranger confronted each other with a start of recognition, for the latter was none other than Sir Hector Forbes.

"Munro!" he exclaimed. "What a curious coincidence to meet you here!—But what ails you? You have lost the fine complexion you had at Achnacairn. Have you been ill?"

"No, Sir Hector, I am quite well," answered Colin.

"Well, I would not like to give you the lie, but your looks and your words don't agree," said the baronet. "Come, will you walk along with me? I am on my way to the House."

Colin assented, and they went on together.

"You're quite a famous man now, I hear," resumed Sir Hector. "'The Helicon' has won exceptionally high praise: I have read several flattering reviews that must have made your reputation in journalism. I heartily wish you success. I suppose the magazine is making headway?"

Colin's tell-tale face alone might have supplied the answer.

"I wish it were true, Sir Hector," he said; "but it has proved a disastrous venture to me."

"What do you mean?" rejoined his companion, turning a look of dismay and astonishment on him.

"I have been obliged to give it up," was the sorrowful reply. "I have lost all the money I staked on this enterprise."

"Lost all, Munro? How could that have happened? if it's not intruding on your private affairs to ask such a question."

SHIPWRECK

"I thank you for your friendly interest, Sir Hector; but I don't see why I should burden you with the story of my misfortunes, which are pretty much due to my own negligence, and cannot be remedied now."

"My dear sir, you will do me a favour if you will honour me with your confidence, for I am specially interested in the welfare of any member of Dr. Munro's family. The last time I called at the manse your father showed me a copy of 'The Helicon,' and I could see how proud he was of your work. Dear me, do you tell me it has to be given up?"

"At least my connexion with it has ceased."

"Will you explain, Mr. Munro, for I am quite at sea about the whole business?"

"It's an unsavoury story, Sir Hector, and if I did not know you to be friendly to our family, I would not confide the information. To make a long story short, I was foolish enough to place implicit confidence in a stranger, and he took advantage of me to float a new periodical with my money, and now that it is all spent, he proposes to carry it on himself."

"The villain! You surely won't allow him to do it?"

"I am powerless to prevent it. My lawyer has investigated the whole case, and assures me that, even if I had the means to prosecute, I would lose the case: Mr. Sharp has been too clever for me."

"Then, Munro, let me tell you, this cold-blooded rascality has made me so furious, that it would be a pure pleasure to me to expose it. You are quite sure the case is hopeless?"

"My lawyer was decided on that point. Sharp has triumphed."

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

"He deserves to hang," exclaimed Sir Hector. "It's enough to make one disbelieve in Providence when one sees such villains prosper. Poor fellow, I am sorry for you. What can I do to help you? Have you any plan for yourself?"

"None at present, thank you," answered Colin; "but I am not without hope of being able to earn a living. I managed to do it before leaving Scotland, and there ought to be more chance of literary work in London."

"No doubt you have made acquaintance with influential literary people who will be in a position to befriend you?"

"There are one or two—one in particular—on whom I may rely for assistance, and who, I know, will do their best for me; though I hate begging for favours."

"I have just been thinking that some of my political friends might have some influence with the leading papers in getting you a post. At any rate I mean to try. Will you give me your address, so that I may communicate with you should I succeed?"

Colin wrote it down on a leaf in his pocket book, and gave it to his friend, who placed it in his own. Then, looking up, his eye caught sight of a flaring play-bill on a hoarding, and pointing to it, he said:

"Your brother has been more fortunate than you. Look there!"

Colin read in conspicuous type the announcement of the "brilliant success of the rising Scottish actor, Lorraine Wallace, in *Macbeth*."

The smile on Sir Hector's face was a bitter one. Colin saw and understood its meaning, but could say nothing in reply; and after a few more words of friendly counsel and sympathy, the baronet

SHIPWRECK

hurried away toward Westminster to fulfil his engagements there.

Uncertain whether to return to the park or not, Colin was wandering aimlessly along when a man accosted him with:

"Good day, Mr. Munro. You don't often desert your office at this hour. I was meaning to call on you this afternoon."

This individual was the head of the printing office—a shrewd man of business, from whom Colin had received several premonitory intimations as to his publisher's intentions.

"I suppose you know that I have no longer any connexion with the magazine?" said Colin.

"It's pretty well known, sir," was the reply. "I saw what was coming a good while since. From the day you told me you had taken legal advice against Sharp I saw he meant to ruin you. I hinted this to you at the time. From that day he gave up every attempt to push the magazine; and if you had taken him to court, I was prepared to go into the witness box and give evidence that would have proved fatal to him; and with right goodwill, for there isn't a bigger swindler in London."

"I agree with you, Mr. Hart," returned Colin: "my experience of him tallies with your's; but you know the proverb: 'once bitten, twice shy.' I have learnt the lesson—a costly one to me."

"What do you intend to do? Are you leaving London?"

"I cannot tell: that will depend on several things."

"Well, I hope you won't think us all *sharpers* here in London, and don't think your work has been a failure, Mr. Munro; for I believe, if it had

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

not been for that scamp, 'The Helicon' would have held its own against all its competitors. The reviewers have been all of one mind as to its place in the front rank of periodicals."

"That makes my misfortune all the harder to bear, Mr. Hart."

"True; yet I am sure you would rather suffer in a worthy undertaking than succeed in a bad one? But as far as real success goes, you have nothing to regret. Depend upon it, Mr. Munro, you'll make your mark yet in spite of Sharp, and be remembered when he's forgotten. Goodbye, sir, and my hearty wishes for better luck next time."

The kindly look and warm clasp of the hand bore testimony to the sincerity of those parting words, and evoked as warm a response from Colin's susceptible spirit, as the two men took leave of each other. Strange it seemed to him that he, an unknown entrant on the great world of London, and devoid of the requisites for winning friends, had nevertheless found wellwishers ready to champion his cause against the craft and malevolence that had ruined his prospects on this critical occasion.

FAREWELL TO FORTUNE

CHAPTER XXI.

FAREWELL TO FORTUNE.

AN uncontrollable restlessness took possession of Colin Munro on this memorable day on which he found himself deprived of the absorbing work that had filled every hour of the day for months past; and the craving for physical exertion of some kind, as a relief from mental distress, took him into the suburbs.

He had found lodgings near Hampstead Heath, where often he had taken his stand on the highest point of view, to regale himself with the sight of hills; for the longing for his own native mountains never forsook him, and anything that recalled them was welcome. Hampstead, however, on this occasion could not confine his steps, and regardless of time or food, he pressed on over long tracts of country until forced to sit down through sheer exhaustion.

He pulled his handkerchief out of his pocket to wipe his brow and in doing so he drew out a letter, which he had received that morning, but had forgotten in the preoccupation of his mind with the momentous issues of the hour. He took it up now, however, and was soon lost in its contents.

"Dear Old Diogenes," was the familiar beginning, "there seems to be no end of our troubles. We thought it bad enough when you told us that all your money had been lost through the deceit and treachery of that wicked

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

man, Sharp; but now we have a worse misfortune. Poor father was advised by a friend he has in Aberdeen to invest his money in some gold mines in South America, which were making lots of people rich. Mr. Skene assured him it was a safe investment, and father says he did so in the utmost good faith, for he himself had put a good deal of money into it; but the whole thing has turned out a fraud, and those who were expecting to make a fortune out of it have lost every penny. Isn't it dreadful? My poor fortune has gone too, so that I'm now 'a penniless lass' *without* 'a lang pedigree,' and it will never be said of any lover I may have that he married me for money.

"I was afraid father would be overwhelmed by the news, but do you know, after the first moment of surprise, he just said to mother: 'Riches take unto themselves wings and fly away.' I am sorry for your sake. Indeed, Colin, it seemed hardly to distress him, and I could not help contrasting his behaviour under this misfortune with his terrible grief when Hamish gave up the ministry. That was father's death blow: he has never been the same since.

"We don't often hear from Hamish, and when he does write, his letters are cold and unnatural; in fact I hate to read them. But the last time Sir Hector Forbes came to see us, he told me that Hamish was getting quite famous as an actor. Have you ever met him again since that occasion you told us of? It makes me so angry to think that, although he knows you are in London, he never comes to see you. Who would have thought a brother would be so un-

FAREWELL TO FORTUNE

feeling? Sir Hector didn't say very much, but I know he despises him. Of course, knowing how he treated Joanna Sinclair, he could scarcely feel otherwise. He never said a word about *her*.

"Now, dear Colin, though I had to tell you all about our misfortunes, don't imagine we are forgetting yours. I can assure you, father was far more vexed when you told him that all your work had come to grief, and that your little fortune was lost than when the news came of his own loss. We are wondering what you are to do. Won't that darling lady who has been so kind to you be able to help you to get some other work?

"What a good friend she has been to you! I feel I would like to hug her. I am sure she would be a friend indeed if you were to tell her of Mr. Sharp's wickedness. Do let us hear soon, for we are all anxious to know what you mean to do. Mother wants you to come home, for she says she is sure you must be worn out with all this worry. Father is writing to you. I wish I could help you, dear Diogenes, but all I can do is to sympathize and pray that brighter days will soon come and make you forget these dark gloomy ones.

Ever your affectionate,

KITTY."

How long he sat pondering this disconcerting news Colin could not have told, but when at last he rose to resume his wanderings, the sun was verging towards the western horizon, and a sensation of faintness reminded him that nine hours had elapsed since he tasted food.

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

Catching a glimpse of a village in the distance, he took his way toward it, and found a primitive inn, where he called for some refreshment.

England abounds in such picturesque villages, with the church spire rising from amid its surrounding trees, and the rose-mantled cottages clustering beneath; the green on which the children play; the pump round which housewives gather to fill their buckets and indulge in a little gossip; the forge at the end where the blacksmith plies his craft, with horses tethered at the door for shoeing, and their owners discussing the affairs of their little world with as much gusto as the denizens of the city a nation's destiny.

The effect of a good meal on the spirits, humiliating as it must be to those of an ethereal temperament, cannot be gainsaid; and when Colin stepped forth after his repast into the serene atmosphere of an evening in May, he felt disposed to take a less despondent view of present troubles. It was true, he had failed in an enterprise upon which his heart was set, and to which he had devoted his best energy: and this, more than the loss of his money, had distressed him. Yet that failure might be retrieved. Hope was at his side, pointing onwards to the dawn of a brighter day, and youth supplied the impetus to advance and win the prizes of courage and perseverance.

In the meantime, however, he felt an overpowering desire to revisit his home and unburden his heart to those who would understand and sympathize. With this resolution he began his long walk to Hampstead. It was a distance of many miles, and the stars were in the sky, before he reached his lodgings.

There a black-edged letter awaited him, which

FAREWELL TO FORTUNE

he opened with some trepidation. It was from his distinguished friend, Mrs. — to whom he had written, intimating a farewell visit before quitting London. In a few hasty lines she informed him that she could not see him, as she had hoped. A crushing blow had fallen upon her in the sudden death of a beloved and promising son.

Deeply affected by the news, he sat down and penned such words of sympathy as his heart dictated, his own misfortune dwindling into comparative insignificance in view of such a sorrow as hers. For his visits to her home had disclosed the fact that literary fame held an entirely subordinate place in the soul of that noble woman, whose affections reigned supreme over all earthly ambitions.

Deprived thus of advice and help which would have been invaluable to him at this crisis in his life, he felt the less hesitation in leaving the scene of his misfortunes. Accordingly, next morning he paid a final visit to the small office that had witnessed his struggles and hopes and the bitter disappointment in which they had all terminated.

On his desk lay a pile of letters from a number of contributors and readers, all bewailing the cessation of his connection with 'The Heliçon,' which had already been proclaimed by the publisher. Many of those tributes were couched in terms that convinced him that through his efforts to please he had won genuine friends and well-wishers. One in particular from a popular and eminent author assured him that he had no cause to think he had failed in his work, which had deserved the highest praise. His ambition had been to provide the public with a good thing, and the public did not want it.

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

With such tokens of appreciation to lessen the poignancy of regret as he took a farewell survey of the scene of his labours, Colin quitted his office, locked the door, and returned the key to the proprietor. Thus closed a memorable chapter in his career, and one destined to influence all the subsequent stages.

"I thought," he reflected, "that this was the 'tide' in my affairs which was to 'lead on to fortune.' I must have been mistaken: at any rate, I have a conviction that no second tide will come for me. Fortune has had a spite at me from my earliest days, and she will keep up her grudge to the end. But she cannot prevent me from carrying out my own ideals, or turn the current of my life awry. The Disposer of destiny will aid me in realizing those ideals, and His 'Well done' will compensate this and all other disappointments the future may have in store."

THE HAVEN OF HOME

CHAPTER XXII.

THE HAVEN OF HOME.

THE sunshine of a radiant morning in early June lit up the waters of a loch lying amid rocky mountains, as the coach that daily traversed this route passed along its margin. It carried a few passengers, as indeed it could not have accommodated many at any time of the year, among whom was Colin Munro, whose face seemed to borrow some of the prevailing brightness as he drank in the beauty of the scene. When some miles further on the coach stopped, and its occupants alighted, to take their places in another awaiting them at a small inn, he was the first to jump into it.

The transference of luggage and post-bags occasioned some delay, but presently they were on their way along a road that wound among the mountains, from which huge boulders had rolled down and lay scattered over the plain for miles. A brawling stream had cloven a channel defiantly among those rocky barriers, crossing the path at several places, where rude bridges had been constructed, its hoarse murmur the only sound to be heard. As it advanced, the path grew wilder, plunging into the heart of those bare, treeless mountains, above which in the distance peered some majestic peaks gleaming white in their winter snow, and presiding over the scene like winter's kings. Far up on the heights might be descried herds of deer, undisturbed as yet in their happy freedom.

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

Colin Munro's eyes glistened as the scene unfolded itself before him, and if the truth had been told, he would have confessed that even the ruin of his prospects was almost compensated by the delight of his heart in being restored to the place he loved best. London had been to him a prison, in which he had pined for his native mountains and glens; and now, when toward the termination of the long drive, he saw the loch and the line of white houses stretching across its further end, his heart leaped up within him, and he could hardly restrain the exuberance of his spirits. The very place seemed to welcome him back long before he met the smile of recognition from one or two pedestrians they passed. Yes, life spent amid such scenes had charms that far eclipsed, in his estimation, all the attractions of the city; and for the nonce his melancholy experiences there were forgotten in the joy of restoration to the sweet influences of the country.

As the coach surmounted the last intervening ridge and the village came fully into view, he strained his eyes in quest of the inn at which it would stop, and where he expected to find his father awaiting him. Nor was he disappointed, for there by the roadside appeared the tall, soldierly figure of Mr. Munro, and he stood up to wave a salute, which was promptly returned. A few minutes more, and his hand was clasped in his father's, and the smile of welcome needed no words to enhance its genuineness.

"Glad to have you back, my boy," said Mr. Munro, with a warmth that betokened the silent sympathy of his heart with this son who had fared so ill in the battle of life, and had come home with a record of ruined hopes.

THE HAVEN OF HOME

But this was not the time or place for demonstrations of feeling, so the good man in a quiet, practical way concerned himself about the luggage, which had not yet been excavated from the superincumbent pile. Once secured, it was straightway placed on the pony trap awaiting them, and they were on their way along the shore of the loch to the manse.

It was then that Colin discovered the alteration in his father's appearance since their last meeting, and a pang shot through his heart as he noted the sharpened features, the deep furrows on cheek and brow, and the whitened locks. The manly, well-proportioned figure seemed to have shrunk, and the light to have died out of those clear glancing eyes. In the tones of his voice, too, there was a melancholy cadence that struck painfully on his son's ear. No need to explain those eloquent witnesses to sorrow's devastating work; and angry feelings swelled up in Colin's breast against the son who had wrecked a father's hope and happiness so utterly.

"Then, Colin, I suppose you have finally quitted London?" said Mr. Munro, after some minutes of silence.

"As far as I know just now," answered Colin. "It's all 'a blank there."

"Ah well, your home is not a blank," replied his father, in tones of touching sincerity. "See," he added, pointing upwards, "there's Kitty standing at the very edge of the cliff, the reckless girl, and waving her welcome."

Tears filled the brother's eyes at the sight. Alas! he had often pictured a different home-coming, as the successful proprietor and editor of an influential journal that reflected credit on all connected with him. And now!

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

"Kitty, don't smother your brother all at once: give him time to breathe," expostulated Mr. Munro, as the girl sprang forward and threw her arms round him, hugging him to her heart's content, while her mother hastened to the spot where the chaise had drawn up, as eager, if less demonstrative, to welcome her unfortunate son.

In moments like these what is all the world's glory, its grandeur, its praise, or contempt in comparison with the affection and sympathy of leal hearts? And where is the trial that will not be robbed of much of its bitterness when shared by one such heart?

Like balm on a wound were those simple words spoken by Colin's mother as she took him in her arms:

"Eh, my laddie, but I'm pleased to see ye. Come away: ye must be hungry after that long journey—Kitty, take in that bag; and don't let your father lift that heavy trunk."

With love's true intuition, no reference was made to the disastrous termination of Colin's venture in London, nor even to the loss of Mr. Munro's money, as once more the little group gathered round the table in that cheerful room overlooking the loch and its glorious surroundings. Colin appreciated this consideration, and was grateful to Kitty for her chatter about local affairs.

She had much to tell of Thornton and its lord, whose position was becoming more and more disagreeable through his churlish and tyrannical treatment of all under his sway. The domestic relations, too, at Thornton had not improved. Poor Joanna was still an outcast from her home, despite all that her mother's entreaties could do

THE HAVEN OF HOME

to bring about a reconciliation between her and her father. Servants' gossip had revealed stormy scenes between husband and wife which were making life unendurable to the latter. Indeed, the bruit went that the ill-assorted pair were about to separate in consequence of a violent altercation, when, defying her Nabal of a husband, Mrs. Munro had gone to visit her daughter in Edinburgh, since he had interdicted any visits from her.

Joanna was still there, the cherished friend of her little charges, and beloved by her employers, who, Joanna had informed Kitty, were shortly leaving Scotland for a sojourn in France and Italy, and were taking the governess with them. It would be in every way an advantage to Joanna, who had not gained in health or spirits since her change of life, as her letters rather hinted than revealed.

This last item of Kitty's communication brought a grave look over Colin's face.

"Has she complained of ill health?" he asked.

"Not exactly," replied Kitty, "but I could see from one or two things she said that she was not as well as she had been."

"Does she know I am at home?" was Colin's next inquiry.

"Of course: I told her we expected you," she replied.

An awkward pause followed this turn of the conversation, which was relieved by some further recitals by Kitty of recent events in the district, and the meal proceeded smoothly and pleasantly to its close, when, invited by the glow of a superb sunset, all adjourned to the garden, to watch the western sky and its reflection on the loch, and the purple glow on the mountains.

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

In the peace and calm of that serene evening Colin found courage to open his heart to those whose sympathy he knew to be deep and true. His story was simply told, and listened to with an interest that made his task easier than he had apprehended. His misplaced confidence and abused trust; the vindictive malice that had brought about the frustration of all his hopes and ambitions; the support and sympathy extended to him by the few who knew the whole truth of the case, especially by Mrs. —, his distinguished patroness—all that involved so much for him was told in those brief words, which but ill conveyed the grief and bitterness that underlay them.

"Well, my son, it is indeed a costly experience," was Mr. Munro's comment, as Colin ceased. "I need not tell you that we all feel the misfortune to be ours as much as yours, and share your regret at this ill-deserved result of your labours; but you remember the lines: 'Tis not in mortals to command success, but we'll deserve it'."

(Oh, only too well Colin remembered them, for the last time he had heard them was from Mr. Sharp's lips on a memorable occasion.)

"And I think," continued Mr. Munro, "that all acquainted with the circumstances of the case must agree that you did deserve success. The Press has been unanimous in its praise of your work, and you have worthily upheld the noblest ideals of literature, and have the satisfaction of knowing that the influence of your work has been all for good, and may have results far-reaching. If you have been thwarted in your ambition by an unscrupulous man, let the shame be his: you are the real victor in this conflict. Take courage, Colin. He whose pure standard you sought to

THE HAVEN OF HOME

uphold will not suffer you to lose by it, though for the present it may seem otherwise. Be assured, He will vindicate your cause in His own time, and fulfil His own promise: 'No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly.' "

"I thank you for your kind words, father," said Colin, more deeply affected than he chose to show. "But you say nothing of your own heavy loss. Can it not be retrieved?"

"No, Colin, the money is all lost," was the calm reply. "I own it was a blow, for I regarded your uncle's bequest as a special provision for your mother after I am gone, and eventually for you all. However, 'the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away,' and I can still add: 'blessed be the name of the Lord.' "

The worthy minister looked round as he spoke those words, and observing that Mrs. Munro and her daughter had lingered behind, no doubt in order to allow father and son to unburden themselves more freely to each other, he resumed the conversation in a yet graver tone.

"Yes, Colin," he said, "it was a thousand times easier for me to say: 'Thy will be done' when this money was lost than when Hamish deserted the ministry and turned aside to a career which no true child of God would ever embrace. Ah, that was the heaviest blow that ever fell on me, for it was not merely the disappointment of my fond hopes, but the awful danger to his eternal welfare in a profession which, according to the verdict of one of its own members, makes virtue almost an impossibility. What could be more conclusive as to that than that discredit has attached to it from the time when it reached its highest development among the most cultured

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

nations the world has ever seen: I mean Greece and Rome; and in our own age we have seen this exemplified. You have read the testimony of Hannah More, the intimate friend of Garrick, who acted her plays; how she publicly recanted her connection with the stage: and condemned it as inimical to the highest interests of men and women. Other testimonies to the same effect I have read. And yet my own son, for whom I have wrestled in prayer to God, has allied himself with such a profession."

Mr. Munro stopped in the moment's overmastering emotion, and as they were approaching the other members of the group he abruptly asked:

"Did you never happen to see Hamish again after that chance meeting in London?"

"No, father," replied Colin; "and that meeting convinced me that he had no wish for another. He appeared ill at ease in my company, and I was conscious of an icy barrier between us that chilled my efforts to reach his real self. He was constrained and unnatural: in fact our interview was so painful, that I was glad when it ended. Besides, I was busy from morning till night with my own work, and often late into the night. In any case, Hamish didn't propose another meeting, and I don't suppose he wished it."

Mrs. Munro and her daughter had now joined them, and hearing those last words, the mother asked:

"How was Hamish looking, Colin? Was he well?"

"He appeared well enough," he replied, "though he has lost his healthy complexion."

"Did he speak of us at home?" she continued.

THE HAVEN OF HOME

"Yes; he complained that he heard so seldom from you, and that you seemed to think he had lost his interest in things here."

"Did he say anything about Joanna Sinclair?" inquired Kitty.

"Yes. I told him how her father had treated her; and that was the only time he appeared like himself and laid aside his unnatural, theatrical manner."

"Was he really vexed about it?" persisted Kitty.

"I think he was. At any rate he was indignant at old Sinclair, and looked as though he would have horse-whipped him if he had had him in his hands," Colin replied.

"Oh, it's the sorest bit of all," interposed Mrs. Munro, "that he threw away one that would have been such a good wife to him as Joanna would have been. For she would have married him, though her father had cast her off without a penny. And who knows what sort of wife he may get if he marries a play-actress?"

"Is Joanna still as fond of him as ever?" enquired Colin.

"Only too fond," answered Kitty. "I know it from her silence as well as from what she sometimes hints."

With this remark the conversation dropped.

Just then a transcendentally gorgeous sunset steeped the whole landscape in a crimson glory. Where the loch opened out to the sea its waters shimmered like molten gold, and the islets that studded them wore the rich purple that transformed them into gems. What wonder that such scenes speak of the heavenly glory to minds attuned to heavenly things?

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

Colin's eye, however, was riveted on his father's face, arrested by the rapt, almost unearthly look it wore. Something seemed to grip his heart and check its beating. What was the venerable minister thinking of, as his eye contemplated that sublime spectacle? Nothing earthly could have inspired such a look. Had he caught a glimpse of the city with its walls of jasper, its gates of pearl and its streets of gold?—that city of which he had so often spoken to his people, as the rest of God's children and their desired abode.

A dread presentiment chilled Colin's heart, and as the splendour paled and the evening breeze sprang up, and reluctantly they turned toward the manse, he asked his father if he had kept well recently.

"Quite well, Colin," was the reply: "my health is one of my daily thanksgivings. Why do you ask?"

"You have grown thinner since last time I was here," replied Colin.

"Possibly: most of us grow thinner as we grow older; but my health is still good, and I thank God I have the use of all my faculties—but now, Colin, I want to know what you mean to do. Have you thought out any definite course?"

They had now gathered in the little parlour. Mrs. Munro had produced her work-basket; Kitty, a piece of embroidery; while Mr. Munro seated himself in the armchair beside a cheerful fire, for the evenings were still chilly, though it was June.

This pointed question as to Colin's future was put as plainly by the looks of both Mrs. Munro and Kitty as by the minister's words, and Colin felt embarrassed by being the centre of interest

THE HAVEN OF HOME

on an occasion peculiarly trying to him. The very intensity of their sympathy and goodwill increased the difficulty he felt in speaking of his great misfortune.

"I'm walking blindly in the meantime," he said. "They told me in London my only chance was there, and Mrs. — has proved so wonderfully kind, and her influence is so great, that I believe it would procure me a good post somewhere."

"You see how our Heavenly Father raises up friends for us amid enemies," remarked Mr. Munro. "You were maintaining Christian principles and seeking to serve Him in the work that had fallen to your lot; and depend upon it, He will provide other work for you by which you will be able to glorify Him and promote His cause. To the Christian there is nothing secular: everything is sacred. As George Herbert says:

'Who sweeps a room for Jesus' sake
Makes that and the action fine.'

Your work on the magazine was not directly religious, but it was pervaded by the spirit of Christianity, and must therefore have exercised an influence pure and elevating. I cannot doubt that God's blessing was on your work, and no work can be said to fail which has that blessing."

"But now I must leave you to tell your mother and Kitty all they want to know about the authors and authoresses you met, and all the rest of it; for my pulpit work is somewhat behind, and this is Friday."

With these words Mr. Munro left the room, and the conversation took the course he had indicated among the three who remained.

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE UNANSWERED SUMMONS.

KITTY had endless enquiries to make about her brother's life in London—the authors and authoresses he had met; their appearance, manners, and characters, and all his transactions with them. Prominent among them all, however, in her mind was Mrs. —, whose extraordinary benevolence to him had awakened a sentiment akin to adoration. It was impossible to satisfy her desire to know every detail concerning that lady, and all Colin's descriptions seemed only to evoke further queries. She listened with keen interest to his recitals of the conversations he had had with her, proud to think that her brother had been so highly honoured as to be the recipient of the patronage and kindness of one of the most gifted writers of her age.

“Wouldn't I have liked to cuddle her!” she exclaimed, as Colin repeated some words of encouragement she had addressed to him.

“I don't think you'd have dreamt of such presumption if you had seen her, Kitty,” he replied. “I never saw such a queenly woman, and never felt so utterly insignificant as in her presence.”

“Ah, poor lady, what will all her fame be to her now that she has lost a son!” said Mrs. Munro. “I daresay she recks little of it. My heart goes out to her, for though I have never seen her, and never will, her extraordinary kindness to you, Colin, has made her a friend to me. I'll never

THE UNANSWERED SUMMONS

forget what she did for you at a time when you most needed help. Oh, how angry I was when we heard how you had been served by that wicked man! and to think he's prospering after all the ill he did you! I'm sure, Colin, your father was more distressed, when you told us you had lost all your money, than he was at the loss of ours."

"It's the reverse with me, then, mother," was the reply; "for I can earn a living somehow, but father has nothing but his stipend, which has never been large, and uncle Murdo's money would have kept you and Kitty in affluence all your days."

"Well, as your father said at the time, Colin, 'riches take to themselves wings and fly away.' Indeed we had hardly time to know we had them when ours flew away. But nobody could help it: all was done for the best; and I'm sure Mr. Skene was as much distressed about it as if it had been his own. Poor man, he has had to face a bigger loss than ours."

"I suppose there's no chance of recovering any of the money?"

"No; your father was told so; but I never saw him less concerned about any trouble he ever had, though he was sorry on my account. It was Hamish's woeful choice that broke him down."

"Sir Hector Forbes told us he was making a name as an actor," intervened Kitty. "Did you hear anything about him in London?"

"I saw his name—his stage name—on the play-bills, and read some newspaper reports of his acting," answered Colin. "He is the only one among us to benefit from uncle Murdo's bequest. Poor Hamish, I wonder if he's happy, with all the applause he gets. At any rate, his life has changed him, and not for the better."

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

"He never can be happy in such a life," said Mrs. Munro. "My mind misgives me that he'll rue the day he turned aside from the path of duty and broke his father's heart."

Little dreamed the mother how soon this prediction was to be fulfilled.

So engrossed were they all in the conversation, that it was with a start of surprise that they heard the clock in the lobby strike ten. Mrs. Munro rose, saying:

"Dear me, I had no idea it was so late. Aillie must get to bed. Colin, run upstairs and tell your father we're waiting. He must have fallen asleep."

She proceeded to bring out from the bookcase the family Bible, and placed it on the table before the chair Mr. Munro always occupied at worship, along with smaller Bibles for the others.

Colin had been gone some minutes, and not hearing any voices upstairs, she went to the foot of the staircase and called to them to come down. Then, after another moment of strange silence, Colin came staggering down the steps, his face deadly pale and his eyes full of an unuttered terror.

"O mother!" he gasped. "Father——"

He could not articulate another syllable, and Mrs. Munro, with a stifled cry, sprang past him and rushed into the study.

There, seated in his chair in the usual attitude, his head leaning back, the open Bible on his knee, and the sheets of the unfinished sermon spread on the desk before him, lay the minister. His eyes were closed, and his hands folded over the Bible he had been reading, just as she had found him on several occasions, and for the first moment

THE UNANSWERED SUMMONS

she thought he was asleep. Trembling, she approached, and laid her hand on his brow, with the whispered name, "Colin."

Ah, that icy, chilling touch! That awful silence! The motionless form! Who that has ever found himself in the presence of "the king of terrors" needs to be told their meaning.

With a cry of anguish she threw herself down beside the lifeless figure. At the same moment Colin's arm was round her, and the words came with a choking sound from his bursting heart:

"Mother, he's at rest. He's with God."

She knew it; but oh, the links that bind us to our clay are fearfully strong, and the severing means cruel pain. Death has the victory here.

"Colin, take the pony and ride for Dr. Jamieson. He may not be——"

A shrill cry arrested the words, as Kitty rushed into the room and threw herself down beside the lifeless form in a transport of passionate grief. She laid her hand on the cold brow, and took one of the folded hands within her own, chafing it as if it might be warmed to life again, and pouring out such lamentations as since that first death, after Eden's gates were closed, have been wrung from human hearts by the relentless foe that has ever mocked love's craving for immortality.

Colin's summons brought the doctor as quickly as the pony's speed could bring him; but it scarcely needed his examination of the body to confirm their own conviction that the spirit had fled. Another witness, too, and far more eloquent, was furnished by the expression on the minister's face—one it never wore in life. A smile of rapture illumined those fine features, as if a vision of the

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

heavenly glory had burst upon his sight before the spirit quitted its earthly tenement.

"Oh, for an artist to paint that face!" exclaimed the doctor, gazing awestruck on it.

"Oh for an infidel, to see it and doubt!" cried the widow.

She could not weep. A sudden blow stuns, bringing with it a merciful insensibility. The time for tears would come later. Meanwhile, death's sad services had to be rendered. The most passionate love that ever warmed a human breast must yield to the inexorable mandate: "Dust to dust."

A large company assembled at the manse to pay their last tribute of respect to one whom they had learnt to venerate; so large, indeed, that the funeral service was performed in the open air. The coffin that held the mortal remains was brought out to the garden, where the roses of June were blooming and the birds singing as blithely as if there were no such things as sorrow and death in the world.

An old college friend of the departed minister, to whom news of his death had been sent, had come to conduct the obsequies. With uncovered head he stood beside the coffin which rested upon two chairs, and read those magnificent words of hope from the fifteenth chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians; then offered up a prayer as simple as it was sincere, and which voiced the sentiments of all the mourners there in its heart-felt tribute to the dead and its entreaties on behalf of the widow and her family, that their heavenly Father would guide and support them throughout their earthly pilgrimage, until in His good time they met again in His house of many mansions.

THE UNANSWERED SUMMONS

Tears coursed down many a bronzed cheek during that impressive prayer, for memories of loving deeds to the dead and to the living were surging up in the hearts of those mourners.

Colin came forward and took his place at the head of those who were to bear the coffin to its resting-place in the little cemetery about two-and-a-half miles distant. Then the long, black-robed procession formed up behind, and slowly wound its way along the side of the loch, till a bend of the road hid it from sight.

In her widow's weeds Mrs. Munro watched it disappear, with her daughter, also in black, at her side. Aillie, too, with her face half buried in her apron, stood behind them, her honest tears falling fast.

"Mother, come to the cliff: we can see them from there."

How strange and unnatural sounded Kitty's voice, how harsh and unfeeling the words; and yet, as she threw her arm round her mother's waist and gently led her to the spot overlooking the loch and the winding path alongside it, there was ineffable tenderness in the action. The widow passively submitted, and they stood, following with their tear-dimmed eyes the long black line threading its way among the trees that fringed the margin of the loch.

"Oh, why was my son Hamish not here this day?" were the mother's first words, as the last dark speck vanished in the distance. She had not spoken during that mournful vigil, but now, with these words, her tears gushed out, and her frame shook with the intensity of her grief.

Thankful to see her able to weep at last, Kitty only drew her closer, and mingled her tears with hers.

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

When, after the paroxysm had spent itself, the widow found utterance, she continued:

"Surely, Colin's letter hasn't reached him, or he would have come!"

"He may have left London, mother," suggested Kitty. "If there was any delay on the way, the letter would reach him too late for him to be here; and if he has left, we have no address to write to."

It was true, and with slow, sad steps they walked back to the home whose light was quenched for them.

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Twelve hours later on that same day, in a crowded theatre in London, resounding plaudits were rising from its brilliant tiers of spectators at the close of the play, as an actor made his exit and the curtain fell.

He was on his way to his dressing-room when an attendant approached him and handed him a letter. He glanced at it carelessly at first, letters from admirers being ordinary experiences, till his eye caught sight of the address, when, entering his dressing-room, he tore it open and read these words:

"Dear Hamish,

I grieve to tell you that father died suddenly last night. The funeral takes place on Tuesday. Come, if you possibly can. I can say no more just now, as there is hardly time to catch the mail, and I have everything to arrange.

Your affectionate brother,

COLIN."

Half-an-hour later another actor knocked at the door, and entering found his friend, still in

THE UNANSWERED SUMMONS

stage attire, sitting with his elbows resting on the dressing-table and his face between his hands, the open letter lying beside him.

"Good heavens, Wallace, what's the matter?" he exclaimed.

"I have lost my father," was the answer, spoken in an awed whisper.

"Poor chap, I'm sorry for you," said the other; then, seeing that his associate wished to be alone, he retired.

All had left, and the theatre was darkened before Hamish Munro quitted it for his lodging in the city.

Desperately wretched, he paced his room, unable to bear his thoughts, which seemed to shriek their accusing message into his very brain. What was he to do? Could he go home and meet the unspoken reproach in his mother's eye and in the tears he knew were falling down his sister's cheeks? Even if he had had the courage, however, it was now too late for him to be present at the funeral. A glance at his brother's letter proved it. Yet was it not his duty as a son to go home at such a time of bereavement? All through the hours of a sleepless night this question kept repeating itself in his mind; and when he rose next morning, he had resolved to beg his manager to release him from his engagement and allow him to perform a duty so urgent.

The response he met was an emphatic refusal. His absence meant financial loss: there was no one to take his place on the stage; and the signal success he had already won would be fatally compromised. All the other members of the company would be involved in the disaster, and he, the manager, would be responsible for their loss.

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

He was very sorry, but to break an engagement of this sort was out of the question.

To Hamish Munro this decision brought—not disappointment, but unspeakable relief. Yes: he was saved the ordeal he dreaded: he could now plead impossibility for preventing his visit.

But he could at least write to them at home. The task, however, proved a more difficult one than he apprehended. Nevertheless it must be attempted, and sheet after sheet was covered with writing and then torn up before he could produce what he deemed fitting for the occasion.

“I am only too well aware,” he wrote, “that my action in giving up the ministry is a black count against me, though I did my best to reconcile father to it for reasons which to my mind were sound; and I had hoped to prove to him that his son had not disgraced his name by adopting a profession against which he entertained an ineradicable prejudice. It is a woeful disappointment to me that that hope will never be realized; and I don’t think I need to tell you that the thought of the grief I caused him is a sore punishment that might at least lessen the reproach you feel toward me. And let me assure you, all the reparation I can make to you, mother, will be reckoned a sacred duty, which it will be my first desire to perform.

“To you this loss is irretrievable, for I know what father was to you. He was one of the few out-and-out religious people I have ever known, and the faith that made his life so pure and noble has no doubt brought him his reward now. I often envied him that faith, and wish it were mine.

“I cannot put into words my feelings, but

THE UNANSWERED SUMMONS

I wish you to know that you may rely upon me to render you every assistance in my power in whatever arrangements you make for the future; and I hope you will write to me regularly, to keep me informed.

“Had it been possible I would have been with you on Tuesday, but Colin will take my place. I did my utmost to get away, at this time, but from what I have told you in the former part of my letter you would see that it was out of my power.

Your sorrowing and affectionate

HAMISH.”

The letter was sealed and sent on its way, and the writer experienced a sense of relief on the completion of his task; but the sensation was merely superficial. Thoughts of a father's love, so lightly esteemed, and yet so deep and true, obtruded themselves all through the hours of that day, making the mere idea of appearing on the stage hateful. For the first time the hollowness of it all oppressed him, and he would have given much to be relieved even for once from his engagement, and to be in solitude.

How little did the spectators of his acting that night imagine that throughout the scenes of the play far other scenes were present to the actor's mind — a Scottish loch and its beautiful surroundings, a humble dwelling looking down upon it from its perch on the brow of the hill, and a weeping mother and sister standing there watching a procession wending its way to a father's last resting-place.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TRANSPLANTING.

THOSE first days of absolute blank that succeed every bereavement had passed at the manse. The newly-made widow had been shielded, as far as love could do it, from the business details connected with the church and manse, which otherwise would have claimed her attention, by her son's active services; and his presence mitigated the desolation of her spirit more than she herself was aware of. True son as he was, he forgot his own concerns in furthering hers, glad that he was now at liberty to do so.

There is perhaps no hardship in the life of a minister's widow more painful than the necessity of quitting the house which she may have occupied for a long term of years, after the death of her husband; and such a trial had now to be faced by Mrs. Munro. Despite the delicate consideration shown her by the congregation and the studied avoidance of anything likely to remind her of the impending change, she deemed it advisable to make preparation for leaving the manse as soon as possible.

It was now that they all recognized what a boon the lost money would have been, for, except her small jointure, Mrs. Munro had no other source of income; and it was now that Colin most regretted the loss of his share; and still more the

TRANSPLANTING

prospect he had cherished of a harvest from his labours in the literary world. For him the situation was more critical than in his mother's case, for, on the one hand, if he decided to return to London, what was to become of her and Kitty; and on the other, if he remained with them, what of his chance of securing the good position he had some reason to look for, through the influence of his distinguished patroness?

On their part, his mother and sister, aware that he had such prospects, were determined that they should not be sacrificed on their account. Mrs. Munro assured him that she could maintain herself by getting a small house and taking in boarders; while Kitty announced that she would go out as a governess, as Joanna Sinclair had done; and though she was not so clever as her friend, she believed that her education at Darnley House had been sufficient to qualify her for the humbler branches of teaching.

These representations, however, had an effect the reverse of that intended, for after listening to them Colin's resolution was immovably taken that he would relinquish the prospects he might have turned to account in London, and remain to provide for and protect his widowed mother and his sister. He had still an opening in Edinburgh, he said, for tutorial work, and he had little doubt that his friend, of "*The Advertiser*," would be ready to accept of his services in connection with that journal. Nor would he listen to any expostulations on the subject.

"Do you think I could be happy, mother," he asked, "even if I were flourishing in London, with you left alone and serving strangers, and Kitty perhaps a drudge in some family who might treat

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

her badly? No, no! it's out of the question. We'll go to Edinburgh and get a house there, and live together; and I believe I'll be able to earn as much as will keep us in comfort. There's nothing to prevent it, and I'll have a motive for work that I never had before: I'll be breadwinner."

Mrs. Munro burst into tears, and Kitty threw her arms round her brother's neck, her own eyes wet. Colin felt so extremely uncomfortable, that he unceremoniously left the room, saying he had something to do, though what it was he did not specify.

But from that hour the decision was taken to remove to Edinburgh as soon as a dwelling there could be procured.

A week had passed since that mournful funeral day. At its close, as the mourners sat together one evening in that pleasant room looking into the garden, the widowed mother rose at the striking of the clock in the lobby, and taking down the family Bible from the place it had occupied so long, she placed it in her son's hands, saying:

"Colin, you must be priest now."

He looked up into her face deprecatingly, as much as to say: "I'm not worthy to take father's place"; but she would not accept the disclaimer, and pointed to the vacant chair at the table. It was a painful moment for him, and as he took the place in silence, and Aillie came into the room to her accustomed seat, his feelings threatened to make his task impossible. An influence, however, was at work on his spirit—a divine influence that lifted him out of himself into communion with the spirit of his father, who had so often worshipped God there, and under its sway he read from "the

TRANSPLANTING

eternal Book" those words of immortal hope which have robbed death of its bitterness and "brought life and immortality to light." And the prayer he poured forth, if lacking the impressive language in which his father had addressed the Hearer of prayer, came from a heart that realized its need and made it known to Him who alone can supply that need.

It was a solemn and yet comforting hour for the worshippers, and the simple service seemed to bring them into closer communion with the departed head of the house, and lifted their thoughts above this world to the contemplation of things divine in that other world which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived."

And now that Colin's plan had been acquiesced in, preparations for leaving the manse began.

Mrs. Munro and her daughter had gone to Edinburgh and been successful after a good deal of discouragement in securing a residence in one of the high houses in the older part of the town. But it required all the widow's fortitude to reconcile herself to the woeful contrast presented by this new home to the one she was leaving at Achnacaim. Poor Kitty could not restrain her tears, and realized more painfully than she had yet done what the loss of their brief opulence had involved.

Colin knew the locality in which the house they had chosen was situated, for his former lodgings were in the vicinity. It was his wish to hasten their departure, as every day that passed seemed to intensify the pain of severing their connexion with the house endeared to them by many sacred memories, and he saw that the tension of feeling

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

was telling on his mother's health. She herself concurred in his wish, and proceeded to complete the arrangements for removal.

A flitting is always a discomposing experience, comparable only to the uprooting of a tree. The displenishing of the house of its furniture and ornaments is itself a painful business, and the transference of those familiar articles to new surroundings no less so. Somehow the associations inseparable from those mementoes of the past seem unwilling to accompany them to other scenes, where they must henceforth be merely reminders of a period for ever past. At least such were the feelings of Mrs. Munro and her daughter as on this bright warm day in July they watched the departure of a heavily loaded van from the manse gate. Another consignment of household stuff was to follow later, and this morning Colin was assisting in packing various articles lying in confusion around him.

Kitty and her mother were busily engaged trying to educe some sort of order from the chaos, when Aillie ran upstairs to them in a state of high excitement, exclaiming:

"O mistress! the laird's wantin' to speak wi' ye. He's in the parlour, an' there's no a chair for him to sit doon in."

Mrs. Munro surveyed her disordered gown and soiled hands with dismay, and looked helplessly first at Aillie, then to Kitty, whose dishevelled locks and heated complexion were equally disconcerting.

"Colin, I really cannot go down like this," said Mrs. Munro, "put on your jacket, and tell Sir Hector to excuse us. I'll follow as soon as I can."

Colin displayed his blackened hands and dust

TRANSPLANTING

covered attire, but did as requested, and went to receive the visitor in the dismantled room.

The baronet was standing at the window, gazing on the scene that had captivated so many eyes, but on Colin's entrance he turned round and held out his hand in greeting.

It was not taken, however: instead Colin held up one of his, and said:

"You must take the will for the deed, Sir Hector: you see we're preparing for removal."

"Grieved indeed I am to see it, Mr. Munro," replied the visitor, adding: "I reached home only last night. You know, I suppose, that the business before Parliament just now won't allow of any absentees: otherwise I would have come to see Mrs. Munro before this time. Indeed, it was a matter of deep regret that I could not be present at your father's funeral. Is your mother well?"

"She is, Sir Hector, I am thankful to say," answered Colin, "and she asks me to make her apology for not being ready to receive you; but she will come in a few minutes. Let me take you to another room, where there are still one or two chairs"; and he led the way to the apartment adjoining.

"And so you must leave Achnacairn?" continued the laird. "Could you not have found a home in the neighbourhood? It seems cruel that you should have to quit your connexion with the place after all those years of residence among us."

"The change is inevitable," answered Colin; "and perhaps it's better for mother that she should be away, because everything here reminds her of the past and emphasizes the contrast between it and the present."

"Then, if I may enquire, I would much like to

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

ask what Mrs. Munro's present intentions are. I am told you have taken a house in Edinburgh: does she intend to make her home there?"

"Yes, as far as she herself knows at present."

"And your sister: she of course will be with her."

"Oh yes: I could not think of their separation."

"And you, no doubt, will be returning to London? Ah, what a scandal that was—I mean the ruin of your fine magazine."

"It was rather a hard experience, Sir Hector, but I must think of the present. I intend to remain in Edinburgh."

The baronet's face expressed the surprise he did not utter.

"But I understood you had made a good connexion in London," he said after a pause.

"I had, indeed, the acquaintance of several influential people, who might have promoted my interests had I gone back; but present circumstances keep me in Scotland."

The words appeared to interest Sir Hector, for he eyed Colin earnestly, and was evidently ruminating on them. Presently, with a perceptible effort, he said:

"Pardon me, Mr. Munro, but my profound respect for your worthy father's memory must be my apology for interesting myself in the welfare of his family. I have heard of the heavy pecuniary loss you have had to meet; I know also that Dr. Munro's stipend was wholly inadequate; and I trust you will not deem me impertinently inquisitive or presuming on the right of a friend if I ask you whether your circumstances are such as to secure your mother and sister against privation of any sort."

TRANSPLANTING

Highland pride, or rather that spirit of noble independence which has given Scotland a premier place among the nations, revealed itself in the glance of the youth's clear, steady eye and the flush that rose in his cheek as Colin replied:

"I would not be my father's son, Sir Hector, if I resented such a proof of your esteem for him and your kind concern for us. The loss you refer to was indeed a sore calamity for us all, and for mother's sake especially I regret it; but I believe she will be secured against the privation you fear. At any rate I'll do my best to prevent it, and I have good reason to hope I will."

Again the baronet appeared lost in thought, and when he spoke, it was in tones of concern as he bent his gaze on Colin's face.

"Then, as far as I can see," he said, "you are sacrificing your chance in life for the sake of your mother and sister. It is truly noble on your part, and I honour you for it, but I wish it could have been otherwise."

Here a peculiar expression flashed across the laird's handsome countenance, and his heightened colour betrayed some secret agitation.

At that moment Mrs. Munro, in her widow's garb, came into the room, and the visitor rose to meet her with the deference which deep sorrow never fails to evoke from any generous heart.

She spoke calmly of her loss, and listened appreciatively to the tributes Sir Hector paid to her husband's character, both as a man and a minister. With simple frankness she told him of her arrangements for the future, as far as she had been able to provide for it.

When she ended, Sir Hector, with a warmth and cordiality that touched her deeply, assured her of

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

his earnest desire to prove a friend, and extracted a promise, that she would give him a friend's privilege by allowing him to testify the sincerity of his regard should she ever be in need of such advice or assistance as he could render.

She thanked him with her tears.

Presently he said:

"I trust Miss Munro is well? I would like to see her before I go?"

Mrs. Munro apologized for the general confusion, saying her daughter, like herself, was in *deshabille*, but she would call her.

She presently returned with Kitty, who certainly did not look her best, her tangled hair and rather disorderly attire entitling her to the tribute of "beauty unadorned." The blush upon her cheek, however, seemed to compensate those defects in Sir Hector's eyes, for they surveyed her with a look of unmistakable admiration, and a becoming deepening of the healthy red upon his own cheeks gave further indication of it. There was a certain bashfulness in his manner as he advanced to meet her, that lent a charm in keeping with the words he addressed to her. Very simple words they were, but the accents in which they were spoken made them eloquent.

"So I am to lose some of my best friends," he said. "Achnacairn will be no more the same to me. I have been pleading with your brother to seek a home in the neighbourhood, but, it appears, that is impossible."

"I think it is better for every reason that we should go to Edinburgh," answered Kitty; "though it will be a sore wrench to leave our home."

TRANSPLANTING

"But you won't forget friends, I hope?" rejoined the baronet.

"No, never," was the emphatic disclaimer: "my friends make up my life."

An earnest look of admiration shone in those expressive eyes bent upon her, and words were on the listener's lips which he had difficulty in repressing. Then, evidently reminded that his presence on such an occasion might be inconvenient, with a glance round the dismantled rooms, he turned to go. Both looks and words attested the genuineness of his regret at parting with them, and as they watched his fine tall figure disappear, tears were on the cheeks of both mother and daughter. And when Colin recounted his conversation with the laird, their tears flowed faster.

To hasten their departure and escape similiar interviews was now the paramount wish of all three.

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

CHAPTER XXV.

THE REVELATIONS OF ADVERSITY.

SOME hours later the same day another visitor arrived at the manse to bid its inmates adieu. This was Mrs. Sinclair.

"I know I'm in the way, and I shouldn't have come at a time like this," she apologized, "but I could not get any sooner. Mr. Sinclair has been laid up, and he'll have nobody to wait on him but me. I could not let you go away without coming to say goodbye, and sorry I am to say it. This is a sore change for you, Mrs. Munro, and for you all, and you have my sympathy; but you have one comfort: your children are to be with you, I hear. It's different with me, that have lost the only bairn I had, and my only comfort."

Here the poor woman burst into tears, and Mrs. Munro, with true delicacy, shrank from betraying any knowledge of what had been told her of the deplorable life Mrs. Sinclair had led since her separation from her daughter.

Recovering her self-possession, Mrs. Sinclair proceeded to make the request which, as much as the claims of friendship, had brought her to the manse.

"If it's not asking too much," she said, "would you let Joanna come to see you in her leisure time? For, though the family she's with are very kind,

THE REVELATIONS OF ADVERSITY

I know she's lonely at times, and it would be such a relief to my mind to know that she had you to go to for advice and help. She'll be away with that family in foreign parts for a good while, but they'll be home by-and-bye. Oh!" she added vehemently, "isn't it cruel that I canna have my ain bairn under my roof?"

What could the hearer of such words say in reply?

"Nobody knows what a life I've had in that house," continued the unhappy wife, "since the day Joanna refused Sir Hector Forbes. Oh, I wish she had taken him, for he would have been a kind husband and as kind a son-in-law."

A look of acute distress came into Mrs. Munro's face. Though not meant as such, the remark seemed to imply a reproach, since but for her own son that marriage might have taken place.

Perhaps it had occurred to her that the remark was inopportune, for Mrs. Sinclair changed the subject, saying:

"I'm glad I never tried to force the lassie into a marriage her heart didna lie to. I had good reason no to do that: it was the mistake o' my life. When Mr. Sinclair proposed to me, I was but a thochtless lassie, and my parents were keen to have me weel married, as they reckoned. Mr. Sinclair was makin' wealth, and likely to have more, and I might be a fine lady some day. So I listened to what they said, and though I little kent what I was doing, I consented to marry a man I neither knew nor cared for, and though I had a lad o' my ain that would have laid down his life for me. But alack! he was poor, and I left him, to my sorrow. Eh, sirs! Mrs. Munro, I have rued my folly ever since. Yes, Joanna was wise to refuse Sir Hector

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

since he wasna her choice; though I havena a doubt that she would have had as kind a husband in him as ever woman had. But I shouldna be troubling you with my griefs," she interrupted herself, "when you have sore ones o' your own to reckon with. Ye must pardon me, Mrs. Munro, for ye see, I have no one to open my heart to, and sometimes I feel as though it would break for want o' a kind word."

"Don't apologize to me," responded the widow. "If I could help you, I would do it willingly, but you see it's out of my power. But with regard to Joanna, you may rest assured that she'll have a home with me as long as she needs one. I'll do my best to be a mother to her, and Kitty, I know, will be as good a friend to her as when they were both here together."

The assurance was gratefully received, and the interview closed with mutual good wishes and hopes for happier days.

Yet before the manse was vacated another visitor made his appearance in the person of Mr. Malcolm Munro. Very unlike his departed brother was this individual both in appearance and character. No one could have mistaken him for a farmer, his robust, athletic figure, ruddy complexion, and homely garb, as well as his speech and gait—all attested it. Born and bred on the farm, he had never quitted it, as his two brothers had done, so that his world was a smaller one than theirs, though his sympathies were as wide, and his benevolence as free.

He had never been a frequent visitor at the manse, as holidays with him were few. Besides, he felt out of his element in towns; indeed anywhere beyond his own acres. Nor was this visit

THE REVELATIONS OF ADVERSITY

expected, as he had so recently been present at his brother's funeral.

"So ye're leavin' Achnacairn, Kate," he said, as he stepped into the empty house, and his sister-in-law piloted him to the only apartment in which a seat still remained. "Aweel, it's a world o' changes. And it's Edinbro' ye're goin' to?"

"Yes, Malcolm: at least in the meantime," she replied. "We've taken a small house there."

"Ay, I ken that. But look ye here, Kate, I'm Colin's brother, and have some right to know what's to become o' you and Kitty. Ye canna have much in yer purse, for he never had much; and eh, sirs! Colin was sair left to himsel' when he risked a' that siller in thae fause mines. Puir man, he did it for the best, and we needna waste thocht on what canna be mended; but I was wiser, and mine is safe in the bank. So I can help ye, Kate, and I'm here to do it. If ye'll lippen to me, and tell me just what ye need, I think I can make it good."

Completely taken aback by this all unlooked for generosity, the widow was at a loss to reply, and the cordiality with which the offer was made touched her deeply.

"Malcolm," she said at length, "this is kindness I never expected. I wish I could thank you as I would like to do; but indeed I could not accept it. With what I have of my own and what Colin expects to earn, we'll manage to pay our way; and Kitty means to help. So don't trouble about us. You have your own bairns to provide for, and your wife must come first."

"She's well provided for," he rejoined, "and Lewie and Donald can do what their father did before them—work hard and make their livin'.

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

No, Kate; don't think I'm wrongin' them in proposin' to help you. It's my pleasure as well as my duty to do a brother's part to you and your family. I'm heart sorry for ye a' except——"

Here the true-born Highlander looked fierce, and his eye had an ominous gleam in it as he continued:

"Tell me, Kate: what's Hamish goin' to do for you?"

The widow's pale face flushed, and her voice faltered as she replied:

"He has said nothing about that as yet, and in any case I would not accept money from such a source as his profession."

"Well, Kate, if that's your feelin', I respect it; but he has his uncle's money. That was honestly got, and ye needna swither to use it if he sends it, as I hope for very shame's sake he will. It's little he can do at the most to make up for the disgrace he has brought on us a'. It'll stand against him to his dying day that he broke his father's heart.—But I shouldna speak o' these things to you, Kate," added the kindly, sympathetic brother-in-law, as he observed the quiver of pain that shot across the mother's face. "The Lord may turn his heart yet."

"It's my constant prayer," was the earnest response.

"You have a worthy son in Colin," proceeded Mr. Munro. "Poor lad! to think he should have fa'en into the hands o' sic a rascal as that publisher. I suppose a' his money has gaen too?"

"Oh, yes; but it was honestly lost on his part, so that he has nothing to reproach himself with. He seems to think he may be able to make his way without it. Nothing would give me greater

THE REVELATIONS OF ADVERSITY

happiness than to see him taking a good position and honoured by his fellowmen."

"I believe ye'll see that yet, Kate, for he's a clever chiel, and has the spirit o' his race. He'll be a credit to us a'. But, Kate, ye're puttin' me aff wi' a' this talk. Now, see here; I hae brocht thae few notes, and winna take them back wi' me. Kezia said I was to tell you she'll be sore displeased if ye refuse to take them, for she has aye looked upon you as a sister, and says she knows you would have done the same by her."

The worthy man thrust the notes into the widow's hands, but those hands did not close upon them, for they were pressed upon her face, and tears found their way between the slender fingers.

"Hoots, Kate, this is needless," expostulated her brother-in-law: "ane would think I was givin' a' I had, and I'll ne'er miss't."

She found words at last to thank him, but her acceptance was made on condition that as soon as she could do so the money was to be repaid; and to this condition he assented on another: namely, that before accepting repayment he must satisfy himself that she was in a position to warrant such repayment.

Those grateful tears on the widow's face gladdened the honest farmer's heart; and he but imperfectly guessed how his benefaction had lightened hers.

He had an encouraging word for Colin and his sister, and left the manse with their benediction.

"Isn't it true, mother," remarked Kitty, after he had gone, "that 'adversity tries friends'? We never knew what a true friend we had in uncle Malcolm."

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

"I regret we didn't know it sooner," responded Mrs. Munro.

But another illustration of that trite proverb quoted by Kitty was presently forthcoming.

The day of departure was now at hand. All the household plenishing had been removed to Edinburgh, and Colin had gone there in advance to superintend its distribution in the new house.

The few final arrangements were completed. One painful duty, however, remained to be discharged—the dismissal of their kindly servant, whose wages fell due about this time. Mrs. Munro shrank from the separation, because the relations between mistress and maid had been so entirely cordial that Aillie was regarded rather as a member of the household than as a servant. Mrs. Munro had deferred this duty till there was no more room for delay, so on this morning she entered the kitchen, to find Aillie on her knees, scrubbing the floor with might and main.

"Come wha likes," said she, looking up from her operations, "they'll no' get a dirty hoose."

"No, Aillie," assented her mistress, "and I trust it will always be as clean as you have kept it. We are all sad to leave our pleasant home, and I know you are too, Aillie; but it's unavoidable, and we must submit to God's providence. I'm truly reluctant to part with you, for we have got on well together, and you have been a dutiful servant to us; but you know, Aillie, my circumstances now are very different from what they have been, and I must dispense with many of the comforts we had here. I'm sorry to tell you, Aillie, that I cannot afford to have a servant now, and you will have to seek another place. I have

THE REVELATIONS OF ADVERSITY

no doubt you will easily find one where you can earn a better wage than I am giving you now. Here it is, Aillie, and I wish it had been as large as you deserve."

The girl had risen from her knees, and stood listening to these words with a face of indescribable woe and amazement.

"Mistress Munro," she at last found voice to reply, "where *you* go *I'll* go. I'm wantin' nae wages: gie me my meat an' bed, an' I want naething mair. I ken wha I'm servin', an' I'll gang naewhere else."

Thoroughly nonplussed, Mrs. Munro stood silently searching the girl's face, as if in quest of confirmation of this announcement, the money in her hand, from the sight of which Aillie turned away with fervid scorn.

"I'm no' wantin' ony wages," she repeated with a sob. "Let me gang wi' ye to Edinbro, an' I'll ask naething mair."

Hereupon Aillie threw her apron over her face and wept.

"Aillie, this is a kindness I never looked for," declared Mrs. Munro, deeply affected by this proof of faithful attachment; "but, you know, it would be wrong in me to accept it, for I would be depriving you of the means of making a livelihood, and I cannot do that."

"Weel, Mistress Munro," returned Aillie, "a' I hae to say is, I'm no' gaun to leave ye, gang whaur ye like, unless ye're no' wantin' me."

"Certainly I want you, Aillie, but ——"

"Ye needna say anither word, for I'll bide wi' ye as lang as I hae health to work," was the firm reply.

What, indeed, could the mistress say to such a

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

protestation? And so it was settled by the surest of all compacts—that which love has ratified.

A radiant July morning saw a group of three persons stepping out of the manse. A last look into its familiar rooms, then Aillie locked the door, and gave the key to one of the elders of the congregation, who had come to receive it and bid them goodbye.

The pony-trap, with Donald, who had been a kind of factotum at the manse, beside it, stood at the gate to convey them to the village. Poor Donald himself looked must disconsolate, for he too was leaving the service of a master whom he had revered, and in whose service he would have been well pleased to spend his life.

Oh, how beautiful looked the loch amid its majestic mountains in the early morning light, as they drove along its shores. The heather's rich purple was deepening on the hills, and the ripening grain shone golden in the cultivated patches on their sides. Never had the scene appeared more enchanting, and every object as they passed seemed to upbraid them for quitting its loveliness.

The villagers had turned out to see them depart, and as the phaeton drew up beside the inn, a little crowd of men, women, and children surrounded them, all eager to shake hands once more and wish them godspeed. Kindly words, and tears more eloquent, greeted them and made their hearts ache. How often it happens that we only discover the love we have won at the hour of separation. Many proofs were now forthcoming that the ties which bound the people to the man who had striven to lead them heavenwards and to his family were firm and true.

But the mail-coach was waiting to start, and

THE REVELATIONS OF ADVERSITY

might not be longer delayed. The three travellers took their places in it, the postilion cracked his whip, and the horses set off at a brisk gallop, amid farewells and a few cheers from the company in the rear, who stood watching it till it reached the highest point of the road, when two handkerchiefs were waved from it, and answered by many more. Then it disappeared over the ridge, and Achnacairn was lost to sight, the last glimpse of it dimmed by falling tears.

Thus closed another chapter in the simple life of a minister's family. They must now look forward to what the opening one would have to record.

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

CHAPTER XXVI.

A FRIEND AT COURT.

THERE are few more humbling experiences than to return after a period of absence to the scene of our former activities, where we played a part that, to ourselves at least, was of some importance, only to find that part played as well or perhaps better by somebody else. This reminder that the world can go on without us is salutary, and ought to make pride impossible. On the other hand, however, it holds equally true that each individual has a task to perform that no other can; that "to every man his work" is assigned, and if neglected, must remain undone. In the divine government mankind are dealt with not in the mass, but individually, and the burden of responsibility must be borne by each for himself.

Colin Munro soon discovered that his place had been filled even within the year of his absence. His former pupils had all been provided with other tutors, and the post he had held in the office of "The Advertiser" was filled by another. In his former patron, the editor, however, he found a warm sympathizer, for he had learned from Mr. Hopkins, of "The Times," full particulars of the literary disaster connected with "The Helicon," and had reproached himself for the advice he had given, and which had indirectly led to it. His desire to assist his unfortunate friend was therefore the more earnest, and he assured him that his contributions to "The Advertiser" would be more

A FRIEND AT COURT

acceptable than formerly, as indeed they had acquired greater value from the high reputation which his writings had acquired in the literary world. He was emphatic, however, in his disapprobation of the decision Colin had taken to remain in Edinburgh; and when told of the distinguished patronage he had won in London, he urged him to return as soon as possible, as otherwise he was throwing away a chance he might never have again.

Colin knew it well; but Duty, that stern monitress, had indicated another path, and he must follow it. The claim of his widowed mother surmounted all personal ambition, and he turned away his ear from the syren voice of Fame, and faced the drudgery from which he hoped to make a living.

This gave him less concern than the resolution his sister had made of earning her living. The idea was repugnant to him, and he endeavoured at first to dissuade her from making the attempt; but she had looked the matter in the face, and would not be beguiled by any representations whatever. Until now she had been fully engaged in assisting her mother in her efforts to make their new abode as homelike as possible, but with only partial success; for the familiar household articles looked forlorn and strangely incongruous with their new surroundings. They appeared to reproach their owners for having wrenched them from their appropriate settings. Nevertheless they were tangible links with these happier days and precious on that account; and when all the arrangements had been completed for their disposition, the general effect was satisfactory, even though it could not reproduce the manse.

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

Those first days in Edinburgh were anxious ones for all three. With the exception of a fee as generous as Mr. Cruickshank could offer for his contributions, Colin had not yet found any other source of remuneration; while Kitty was only now seriously beginning to make enquiries concerning a situation. Mrs. Munro, fortunately for herself, had been trained to thrift, and could make a shilling go as far as any one; but as time went on, and her resources were daily lessening, she counted those precious notes provided for such an emergency by her brother-in-law with deepening apprehension as to how long they would suffice for the demands made upon them.

No further communication had been received from Hamish since that letter written on receipt of the news of his father's death. They had informed him of their removal to Edinburgh, giving him the address of their new residence, but no hint of needed assistance had accompanied the intimation.

That assistance would soon be indispensable was daily becoming more certain, and Colin's exertions were redoubled. Long after his mother and sister had retired to rest he sat writing, and during the day he was pursuing his quest for pupils, furnished by his friend, Mr. Wardlaw, with the names and addresses of several who might employ his services.

It was on one of those occasions that, as he was passing a bookseller's premises, he was arrested by the sight of a journal he knew well: it was "The Helicon," and in prominent type he read the words:

"Brilliant success under new management. Galaxy of eminent writers. A triumph in journalism."

A FRIEND AT COURT

He purchased a copy and put it in his pocket; and he may be forgiven for the poignant feeling of bitterness that rankled in his breast at that moment. The contrast between his present position and what it might have been was brought acutely home to him by this incident, and, like many another victim of human treachery, he asked himself the old question: "Why do the wicked prosper?"

The same evening he showed the periodical to his mother and sister.

"You see what my lost money has done," he remarked with a sarcastic smile.

"You can afford to pity your enemy," was Mrs. Munro's comment. "Unless I am much mistaken, that ill-gotten prosperity will bring retribution sooner or later. You have lost your money, but not your good name. He has lost his, and if success attends him for a time, the reckoning will come, aye, even before he leaves this world."

"I don't suppose you would change places with him, Colin?" said Kitty, with a significant smile.

"Oh, wouldn't I!" rejoined he. "Think what a distinguished person I should be, rolling in wealth, and applauded by the world as a clever, enterprising fellow!"

"Yes, and despicable in your own eyes," returned she. "No, no, Colin; the world will see you vindicated yet, and that rogue exposed."

"Dramatic justice, Kitty? Ah, well, I endorse David's verdict in the Psalms, that the wicked do prosper in this world. I won't be surprised if Mr. Sharp flourishes and finds himself in favour with it. The sheep's clothing is well put on in his case."

Subsequent events seemed to bear out this

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

prediction, whereas Colin's own position became more and more precarious. His contributions to "The Advertiser" brought him what barely sufficed for daily wants, although the remuneration was as liberal as the resources of that paper made possible. His search for pupils had as yet proved unsuccessful, though there was some probability of securing one or two in the late autumn.

Poor Kitty, too, was meeting with sore discouragement in her quest for the post of nursery governess, when at last through the recommendation of a former school acquaintance in the city to whom she had applied, a rather uninviting opening presented itself in a family of six children, the three youngest of whom were to be her charge. "Impudent little brats!" was her description of them, and it was evident from the first that no love would be lost between them. However, there being no choice, she determined to make the best of it, her sole consolation being that her earnings, inadequate though they were, would relieve the burden that weighed so heavily on her brother. Every morning, therefore, saw her setting out on her new labours, which were not labours of love as far as her pupils were concerned; and every evening brought her home, for her employers so preferred, and to her own satisfaction, since she could thus unburden herself of her troubles in the sympathetic ears of her mother, while at the same time she entertained her with accounts of her transactions with her pupils which her own sense of humour enabled her to make doubly amusing.

In this way some months had passed when one morning Colin received a letter written in an unknown hand, which he opened with some

A FRIEND AT COURT

trepidation, for his communications with London had gradually slackened and almost ceased. The epistle proved to be from the last person in the world he expected to hear from—Sir Hector Forbes—who informed him that through a political friend of his own he had gained an introduction to the editor of an influential Review, and that he had advocated Colin's case so persuasively that he believed a favourable reception would be given to his contributions, which would have a wider scope and more liberal reward than was to be expected from "The Advertiser." Sir Hector had confided to the editor as much of Colin's experience in connexion with "The Helicon" as he considered safe, and had secured the sympathy of that gentleman in a degree that warranted friendly co-operation between them. He added that, had Colin been at liberty to return to London, his prospects in this case would have been vastly brighter, but, as that appeared to be impossible, he heartily wished him success, and hoped to have his views on the subject.

A flush of glad surprise kindled in Colin's cheek as he perused that message of hope.

"Read this letter, mother," he cried, thrusting it into Mrs. Munro's hands. "There's a true friend for you."

"A friend indeed," was her comment, as she returned it, grateful tears filling her eyes. "I never knew what a kind-hearted man Sir Hector was. You must write to him at once, Colin, and tell him how deeply we appreciate his kindness; for indeed we had no claim on him at all."

The injunction was hardly needed, for that letter of grateful acknowledgment was written and on its way to London ere night fell. The welcome

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

intelligence had brought a revival of hope when hope was low, and with the eagerness that a noble purpose supplies Colin set to work on the contribution he was to send to the editor of that review as a sample of his literary powers. Late into the hours of early morning he sat at his task, his soul aflame with a passionate desire to achieve success; and when the last sheet was covered with his neat, legible writing, he folded them all up and sealed the packet for despatch next day, his brain too active to admit of sleep.

The ensuing week seemed longer than many a month had done, ere the critical answer came. It was friendly, but not too complimentary, and in the first moment of discouragement Colin was tempted to abandon the project altogether; but a second perusal of the epistle corrected this impulse, and determined him to make another attack on the editorial citadel more vigorous than the former. Accordingly, this purpose engrossed all his energies for the next few days, so that he appeared lost for the time to everything else.

Mrs. Munro had observed with some alarm that he was growing thinner, and the lines on his brow deeper, and remonstrated with him against this ceaseless preoccupation, but nothing could divert him from his task until it was finished and the MS. in the hands of the man whose verdict meant so much to the humble aspirant to his favour.

Again there ensued an interval of cruel suspense, under which he could scarcely touch food; but no other words could so accurately describe his feelings when he read his fate in that eventful missive at last received than those of the wise King of Israel: "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick, but when the desire cometh, it is a tree

A FRIEND AT COURT

of life." Yes, at last success was in sight. His words had met with approval, and an opportunity such as he had never yet had of gaining a literary reputation was now vouchsafed him through this new channel. With a grateful heart and under the magical impetus of hope he set himself to prove worthy of the commendation of this august personage, and from that hour his life had an absorbing purpose that brought into play every faculty of his mind, now relieved from the harassing anxiety he had endured on account of their necessitous circumstances. His brow had cleared, and his very voice had in it a ring of hope and happiness that rejoiced his mother's heart. He had found his vocation, and was proving the truthfulness of Aristotle's definition of happiness as the full, free, and unimpeded exercise of the faculties.

But the supreme moment of his gratification was when he put a handful of sovereigns into his mother's lap, and said with a proud and playful smile:

"The first fruits of my pen, mother. You see what it is to be a genius!"

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

CHAPTER XXVII.

INTERRUPTED RENOVATIONS.

COINCIDENT with Colin's good fortune came a reverse of Kitty's; for owing to an outbreak of measles in the family in which she was employed she lost her situation for the time being, and was therefore at leisure to employ herself with more congenial work.

The apartments of their dwelling were extremely dingy. Ugly and discoloured papers disfigured the walls, and the paint, whatever its original hue, was beyond conjecture now. The depressing effect had from the first displeased Kitty, who loved brightness and bright colours, and she would fain have worked a revolution and made the rooms what her taste suggested, but the want of time as well as the want of means had hitherto put such a scheme out of the question. Now, however, the former of those two requisites was hers, and after some careful calculation she arrived at the conclusion that she could afford to purchase the materials, while she felt confident of being quite competent to do the painter's work herself.

On being apprised of this project, Mrs. Munro discouraged it, not sharing her daughter's persuasion of her own proficiency in this line of business; but Kitty refused to be balked in an enterprise as likely to bring her fame as Colin's to him. Accordingly, patterns of wall-papers

INTERRUPTED RENOVATIONS

arrived and were submitted to Mrs. Munro's approval; and seizing the opportunity of that lady's absence on some errands in the city, the unprenticed artizan began operations. Undismayed by the difficulties that beset her as she proceeded, she persevered in her task, the novelty of which constituted its chief charm to her adventurous spirit.

Aillie's services had been requisitioned, and she had just been despatched for some forgotten materials on this occasion, while her young mistress, attired in such habiliments as she deemed befitting her employment, had become so deeply immersed in her operations, that she did not hear the door bell ring till a louder peal startled her, then dropping the paint brush into the paint she had been stirring, and surveying her disreputable costume with dismay, she repented of having allowed her assistant to leave her. A third ring, however, made longer demur impossible, and she went to answer the summons, and opened the door in a tentative fashion, peering out into the ill-lighted landing on the staircase.

There, his tall figure looming large in the shadow, stood Sir Hector Forbes. With a cry of consternation she retreated, unable in her confusion either to say: "Come in," or attempt an explanation of her present extraordinary attire. But with an amused smile the visitor held out his hand and said:

"Won't you let me come in, Miss Munro? Pray forgive an untimely call; but, being in Edinburgh, I could not deny myself the satisfaction of enquiring for you all."

Ashamed of her plight, Kitty bade him enter, and led him into their sitting-room, upon which,

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

fortunately, renovations had not yet been begun, and asked him to excuse her for a few minutes while she changed her dress.

When she returned, she certainly looked more presentable, but still very uncomfortable. That the baronet would expect some explanation of the metamorphosis he had witnessed she knew, and with the candour that was part of her very nature she at once informed him what she had been doing.

"You see, Sir Hector," she said, "I hate dull rooms, and as we couldn't afford a painter's bill, and our landlord refused to do it for us, I undertook to do it myself. But I'm sorry you should have come just at the very time I was beginning it."

"I admire you for your courage," he answered, "I'm not sure that I could have been so enterprising: but I hope you have some assistance?"

"Oh, yes: Aillie is helping me," said Kitty, "and between us I think we'll manage beautifully."

"Will you permit me to come and inspect your work when finished?" was the next query.

"With pleasure," she assented; "and I believe you'll be thoroughly surprised when you see it."

There was something more than admiration in the baronet's eyes as they were bent on that bright, piquant face.

Presently he enquired:

"Your mother, I hope, has not suffered from this change?" and as he spoke he looked round the apartment, which contrasted sadly with those of the manse.

"My mother is very well," replied Kitty. "I'm sorry she has gone out, but, if you can wait, she will be home soon."

INTERRUPTED RENOVATIONS

"I would be sorry to go away without seeing her," Sir Hector said; then added: "And your brother, has he recovered from his melancholy experience in London? What a scandal that was!"

"Yes, we were all terribly sorry for Colin, but since he got this work you procured for him, he has revived wonderfully. Let me thank you, Sir Hector, for that great kindness. What it has meant for us you can hardly know."

These earnest words seemed to impress the listener deeply; as, with his eyes fixed on the speaker's face, he continued:

"I cannot claim credit for any service worth mentioning. It was a real pleasure to do your brother such service as I could; but I would like to do a great deal more, if you would help me, Miss Munro?"

Quite at a loss to comprehend what he meant, Kitty rejoined:

"I help you, Sir Hector? How can I do that?"

"By marrying me," came the low, impressive answer.

Astonished and speechless, Kitty looked at him as if petrified.

"Yes, Miss Munro," he proceeded, "I came here to-day for the one purpose of asking you to be my wife. Forgive me, if I have been too abrupt and hasty in making the avowal, but I wish to tell you that this has been the desire of my heart for many a day."

Still wondering whether all this was a reality or a dream, and scarcely able to credit her senses, poor Kitty gazed at him in helpless bewilderment, her cheeks crimsoned, and her features working painfully.

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

"Have I offended you?" he asked in grave, earnest tones.

"Sir Hector," she said at last, recovering her self-possession, "I cannot understand what you mean. It's not very long since you were said to be in love with Joanna Sinclair. Is she so soon forgotten?"

This arrow had found its mark, for Sir Hector flushed painfully, and had difficulty in attempting his defence. Only for the moment, however, for in accents rendered doubly impressive by the look of genuine, almost boyish contrition on his face, he said:

"I cannot blame you for that reminder of an act of folly on my part. I did indeed imagine that I loved Miss Sinclair. I was infatuated with her beauty, and her modesty and simplicity charmed me. I still admire her for those qualities; and though her constancy to your brother was a grievous disappointment at the time, I honour her for it now. Had she married me, with affections engaged to another, she would have made both herself and me miserable for life. No, Miss Munro: the love I have for you is of a very different type from that sudden fancy. I find in you every thing my heart craves; and if you can return my affection, it will be my first concern to prove worthy of yours."

"I'm afraid you're just as blind now as you say you were then, Sir Hector," was Kitty's discouraging response. "Pray, how do you know any more of me than of Joanna? What if you find that this is only another infatuation?"

For answer the importunate lover sprang from his seat and imprisoned his tormentor in a resistless embrace.

INTERRUPTED RENOVATIONS

Just at that critical moment Mrs. Munro, who had entered the house unperceived, presented herself before the lovers in this interesting attitude. It would be difficult to say which of the three actors in this scene was the most disconcerted. The baronet's heated complexion almost eclipsed Kitty's crimsoned face. He had the look of a schoolboy surprised in some mischief. Kitty stood overwhelmed with confusion and looking doubly guilty. Her mother, arrested as if a thunderbolt had fallen at her feet, gazed in utter amazement from one to another, waiting for an explanation, which was promptly given by the chief culprit in the transaction.

"Accept my humble apology, ma'am," he said, placing a chair for the intruder, and drawing his own nearer, while Kitty hastily withdrew. "When I called a short time since," he proceeded, "my intention was to ask your permission to make my suit to your daughter; but I could not help myself in her presence, and have told her all. I did not conceal my previous attachment to Miss Sinclair, which was an impetuous infatuation on my part, and deserved the rejection it won. My love for Miss Munro has a deeper source, and is not of yesterday, and if she can reciprocate it, my life will be devoted to her happiness. Let me hope that, in that case, your consent will not be withheld."

The suddenness of so momentous a declaration rendered Mrs. Munro unable to reply for a minute or two, and when she did, there was a note of misgiving in her voice that increased the lover's anxiety.

"You know, Sir Hector," she said, "I have always disapproved of marriages between persons

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

in different stations of life. So many of such alliances have proved unhappy; and it would be a life-long sorrow to me if your marriage with my daughter should expose her to neglect or disdain on the part of your relations; for I know Kitty would resent it more on your account than her own. She would be constantly reproaching herself for having caused you the loss of their society. I would ——”

“As far as I know my relations,” he interrupted, “they are incapable of such conduct as you suggest, and, even were that the case, I can well dispense with the society of any who did not admire and love my wife.”

It was impossible to resist the genuine honesty and chivalrous feeling that voiced themselves in those words; and with that handsome countenance, all aglow with passionate earnestness, before her to enforce the pleading, how could the mother doubt his sincerity?

“Well, Sir Hector,” she said, “if Kitty’s affections are yours, and she is prepared to take the risk of marrying a man so far above her rank, I cannot put any obstacle in her way. As you know, she has been brought up in a very different way from you, and grandeur of any sort she has been a stranger to; but I don’t think she will shame her upbringing as your wife.”

“Kitty is a lady, and the daughter of a lady,” was the graceful rejoinder, “and my home will be honoured by her presence as its mistress.”

“I’ll go and speak to her,” announced Mrs. Munro, rising; “and she’ll come herself and give you her answer.”

Oh, how long those minutes seemed between her absence and Kitty’s reappearance.

INTERRUPTED RENOVATIONS

What her answer was might have been easily ascertained by any one who entered that room shortly afterwards. And, strange to say, the first to make the discovery was Aillie, who, not knowing anything of what was going on, ran in with the paint brushes she had been sent for, expecting to find her young mistress very differently engaged, and bounded back as if she had been shot.

In this condition of stupefaction Mrs. Munro found her, her honest face expressing wonderment beyond utterance.

“O mem!” she exclaimed, “the laird’s in the hoose, an’ he’s coortin’ Miss Katrine. I saw them eenoo wi’ my ain een in the parlour.”

Mrs. Munro could not forbear smiling, as she assured the honest girl that she need have no concern for her young mistress, as she was not likely to be married for a good while.

“Eh, but I’m no suir o’ that,” dissented Aillie. “If the laird has set his he’rt on her, he’ll no wait lang, I’m thinkin’; an’ it’ll be a chinged hoose when Miss Katrine gangs awa.”

Her mistress was only too well aware of the truth of these last words, and rejoicing though she did in a relationship that promised to secure her daughter’s earthly happiness, she could not contemplate without a pang the separation that this marriage must entail. So complex are the affairs of this transitory state, so intricately interwoven with joy and sorrow the web of life, that happiness seems ever purchased at the expense of another’s loss.

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FRIENDSHIP ON TRIAL.

"A LETTER for you, Miss Sinclair."

The speaker was a pretty girl of fifteen, and the announcement was made with a pleasant smile, as her governess entered the breakfast-room of a villa on the shores of Lake Como.

"Oh, from Scotland!" exclaimed Joanna. "I hope it brings me good news. May I read it till breakfast comes in?"

Permission was readily granted, and she sat down beside the French window opening on to the balcony, and was soon so absorbed in its contents, that such trifles as meals were quite forgotten.

"My dear Joanna," the letter began, "I have something to tell you that will, I know, more than astonish you. Would you ever have thought that a good-looking man like Sir Hector Forbes would ever have taken a fancy to one like me, with my red head and green eyes and horrid complexion? The wonder is all the greater in view of his admiration of you, who would have been an ornament to his lordly home, whereas I—oh, I'm afraid to think of myself as mistress there. I recollect you said to me at the time you refused him that you hoped he would find some one who would give him the love he deserved. Did you ever imagine I was to be that one? At any rate, I

FRIENDSHIP ON TRIAL

never did; indeed the whole thing has been so sudden and surprising, that at times I wonder whether it's real or all a dream. It must be a case of love at first sight, for we haven't met very often, and I thought he hadn't got over the disappointment you gave him. I told him as much, and said what I thought pretty plainly. He confessed his admiration of you frankly—I won't tell you all he said—but I'm afraid the old song is right that says men are "to one thing constant never." So, if I should be eclipsed by somebody else, I'll have myself to blame after such a plain warning. Yet in my heart I cannot doubt that he is sincere in this case, and truly devoted to me, and I have discovered so much genuine goodness in his nature, that in marrying him I feel I am not taking an undue risk. His delicate consideration for mother and his services to Colin make us all think highly of him. In short, he is a true gentleman in every sense of the word, and I am proud of him.

"I have only one misgiving, and that is about you, Joanna. It seems mean to be, as it were taking your place, but I'm sure you won't think so, and I know you won't doubt me when I say that, had you really loved him, and he had changed toward you, he never would have had me for his wife.

"I wanted to tell you all this, as you and I have been such good friends for a long while, and have shared each other's confidence; and though there might be some awkwardness at first in your meeting Sir Hector, you must promise to make my home your own whenever you can come to visit us.

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

"Of course I am not getting married for a long while, because I can't leave my dear mother until she has got more accustomed to her changed life here. My consolation, when I go, will be that she has Colin with her, for I know he will be better than a daughter to her, and I don't think there is the least chance of his ever taking a wife. He persists in calling himself a blot on creation, and declares that ugliness is the one sin no woman will ever forgive. I tell him it's nonsense, but nothing can alter his opinion.

"You would have had this earlier, but I have been very busy papering and painting our dismal rooms. By-the-bye, I was just beginning those operations that day Sir Hector called, and I was such a fright, that I wonder he didn't run away; but he showed his gallantry by remaining—perhaps to his cost.

"Mother is well, and sends her love. She hopes to see you soon, so do I.

Your loving friend,

KITTY."

When summoned to the breakfast-table, Miss Sinclair's face expressed the sentiments evoked by this epistle so plainly, that her pupil who had handed it to her, remarked:

"You appeared much interested in your letter, Miss Sinclair. I hope it brings you satisfactory news of home?"

"Quite satisfactory, Caroline," replied Joanna, with a smile. "It tells of the approaching marriage of a friend of mine, and I am very happy about it, as I believe she has made a good choice, and will make an excellent wife."

FRIENDSHIP ON TRIAL

“Why don’t you follow her example, Miss Sinclair?” rejoined her pupil laughingly; but next moment she repented of the remark, as she perceived the quick change that replaced the pleased smile of a moment before. And her mother, who had just joined the group at table, sharply reprimanded her, and at once began talking of something else.

For that reprimand Mrs. Forsyth had a warrant sufficient to justify its severity. A certain incident on their journey from home had revealed to her the secret of the brooding sadness that had puzzled her to account for in her governess, toward whom she, like her children, had become warmly attached. While passing through London, Mr. Forsyth, who was a patron of the theatre, had by way of a special treat secured places for his wife and children and the governess for a play in one of the theatres. Whenever, however, Joanna was informed of this, she begged to be excused, pleading some slight indisposition as her reason; but Mr. Forsyth would take no denial: the seats were taken, he said, and it would be a disappointment to them all if she refused to accompany them. Poor Joanna, who never could find it in her heart to deny any request she could possibly gratify, was over-ruled, and reluctantly complied.

To her the spectacle of the brilliant theatre was an ordeal so painful, that she could not respond to the smiles of delight in the faces of her young pupils. Of what was going on on the stage she took but little heed till from among the group of actors during a scene in the play a voice rang out that stopped the beating of her heart for an instant. Well she knew that voice, and through the disguise which at first had deceived her she

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

recognized the man whom she had passionately loved and could not cease from loving.

Happening to turn round at that instant, Mrs. Forsyth saw that she had grown deadly pale. She drew her husband's attention to her, and he sprang up just in time to prevent her falling from her seat, and carried her from the stage-box into the corridor, where an attendant brought a bench, on which she was laid. The others quickly followed; such restoratives as could be immediately procured were applied; and after some anxious minutes consciousness returned. A conveyance was called, and Joanna carried into it. Mrs. Forsyth and her children followed in another, and in half-an-hour they had reached the hotel at which they were staying.

A doctor was summoned, but all he could say by way of explaining this sudden fainting fit was that it was caused by some shock the nervous system had sustained. This only made the occurrence more mysterious, for no one could imagine anything in the theatre that could have accounted for the collapse, and Miss Sinclair had seemed in her usual health when they set out. A sedative was prescribed and taken, and presently the patient fell into a deep sleep.

Speculation, however, as to the cause of her fainting continued to occupy Mrs. Forsyth's shrewd brain, and she was determined to fathom the mystery. So soon, therefore, as the governess had recovered sufficiently to allow enquiries on the subject, she questioned her cautiously and kindly. Joanna saw that she could not conceal the truth in justice to her employer, who, in the interests of her own children, had some right to satisfy herself as to the previous history of one who had been a

FRIENDSHIP ON TRIAL

total stranger, and to whom she had committed the education and training of those young minds. Accordingly, notwithstanding the pain such a confession involved, Joanna told her employer that among the actors that evening she had recognised one to whom she had been previously attached, but whose choice of the stage as a profession had caused their separation.

The simplicity and genuine feeling that made this avowal eloquent removed also the last lingering doubt in the mother's mind. Now she understood the melancholy that seemed to hover over the governess more or less noticeably at all times, and the natural kindliness of her nature quickly responded to this mute appeal to her womanly sympathy. Never again did she even remotely hint at the discovery she had made. Hence her displeasure at the random remark of her daughter on this occasion.

As has been stated, the attachment subsisting between the governess and her pupils paved the way for a similar attachment between the mother and the governess. Indeed, strangely ill-conditioned must have been the nature that could have felt otherwise than drawn toward this true-hearted, kind, and loving girl, whose sweet face and soul-revealing eyes were fitted to captivate all who beheld them, though she herself, in the simplicity and modesty that constituted her principal charm, never dreamed that she possessed any such attractions.

Had any unseen spectator witnessed the little group in the schoolroom at any time, and watched the youngest twine her arms about the governess's neck and kiss her cheek, this would have sufficiently attested the aforesaid tribute.

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

This morning the lessons somehow did not proceed smoothly. Several times Miss Sinclair's thoughts seemed to have wandered far afield, and she found enquiring glances bent upon her, reminding her of neglected duties.

School-hours had been considerably shortened since the family had taken up their residence in northern Italy. With scenes of such enchantment surrounding them, it would have been almost impossible to restrain those young spirits from the enjoyment within their reach, and when the day's lessons were over, they were often to be found sailing on the lake in one of those boats with gay awnings that dot its surface and add to the brightness of that lovely scene.

The hills with their vine-clad slopes, and far above them the mountain summits in their dazzling whiteness gleaming out against the deep azure of an Italian sky; the promontories, crowned here and there with a chapel or picturesque ruin, that encroached on the lake at different points with such charming effect—all this was to Joanna an exquisite delight. And when on other occasions she and her pupils ascended a hill above the town and gained an eminence from which an extensive view was obtained of the lake sleeping beneath among its guardian mountains, it appeared to her like a glimpse of Paradise, and her soul expanded under the influence of that sublime loveliness. That scene lived in her memory to the close of her life; and, like many another spectator of nature's grandeur, she reflected that, since this world is so fair, what must that deathless, sinless world be!

Those were pleasant days for her, and nature's soothing influences fell like balm upon her wounded spirit. Hope whispered of further

FRIENDSHIP ON TRIAL

healing that coming days would bring. Welcome indeed were those whisperings to a bereaved heart that yet clung to its fallen idol. Yes, time that heals so many wounds, had failed to heal this one, and the memory of that early love was vivid as ever. That spectacle of her lover in surroundings so alien to those in which she had learnt to love him had filled her with horror. In contrast with the ideal she had formed of his destiny his present position was in her eyes terrible declension. That fatal danger to his higher interests encompassed him she saw only too well. Had she found him doing the work of any tradesman, she would not have experienced a tithe of the pain produced by the sight she saw that evening in the theatre.

It was well for her that she had work to do that engaged her energies to the partial exclusion of those torturing recollections; and in the affection of her pupils she found another powerful antidote. Whatever be our burden, work does not make it heavier, but lightens it, incredible though it may seem: an experience which was proving true in Joanna's case.

Gliding over that placid lake on this bright day, and revelling in the beauty around her, she thanked God for the peace and calm that solaced her own spirit.

From her reverie she was recalled by an exclamation from one of her pupils.

"O Miss Sinclair," she said, "you've pulled your letter out of your pocket."

She picked it up and once more began to read its momentous message; and some leagues of blue water had been traversed before she refolded it. She must delay no longer in replying to that message; and when that evening her pupils had

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

retired to rest, and she was alone, she sat down to her desk and wrote out of the fullness of her heart to her chosen friend, whose rival she had unconsciously been.

“The news of your betrothal to Sir Hector Forbes,” she said, “took me quite by surprise, for indeed I had not the least inkling of such a thing, and I scarcely think you would have kept it a secret from me. Well, my dear Kitty, believe me, I am thoroughly gratified that this time Sir Hector has made a wise choice, for I know you are just the sort of wife he needs. With all your fun and mischief you have a balance of good sound commonsense that will fit you for your position as his wife. Your humour will keep him entertained, and though you’ll no doubt tease him to your heart’s content, he’ll like you all the better for it, and find, as others have done, that you are a host in yourself.

“It will be a real satisfaction to you to know that you had to be sought, and were not thrust upon him, as I was, to my shame and sorrow. Oh, how I loathed and despised myself when I was put up for sale, as it were, and dreaded every moment that Sir Hector would see it, as I am sure others did. No doubt, he is grateful to me now for having refused to marry him, and will be congratulating himself on having secured one who will be a far more suitable wife than I could have been with all the will in the world. Please dismiss from your mind any such foolish notion as that we were rivals, for that never was the case. I don’t believe Sir Hector ever really loved me; it was just

FRIENDSHIP ON TRIAL

a sudden fancy, and I am glad you have cured him of it. I quite believe what you say about never marrying him if he had won my affection and then forsaken me for you. I know you too well for that. Alas, dear Kitty, it was another who forsook me, and one I dearly loved and can never cease to love, although I have tried; for this constant grief at my heart unfits me for the duties I owe others who have far more claim upon me.

“I thought I was succeeding, at least in some degree, when something happened that undid all my efforts. When we were in London, on our way here, Mrs. Forsyth insisted on my going with the family one night to the theatre. I tried hard to be excused but I saw that my refusal would be taken amiss, and as they have all been so extremely kind to me, I gave way, little dreaming what was in store for me.

“Can you imagine, dear Kitty, what I felt when I recognised Hamish among the actors on the stage that night? Only too well I knew him in spite of his disguise. His voice — one quite different from any other that ever I heard — would have been enough in itself to identify him. The horror I felt at seeing him in such a place overcame me, and I fainted. They took me home, and when I recovered, I saw that I must give an explanation of what had happened; for although Mrs. Forsyth did not question me directly, I knew she could not but wonder at my fainting. So I only told her that I had seen on the stage a former friend to whom I had been attached. I did not give his name, and she was satisfied with my statement, and has never since asked me any question.

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

But I wish I had never seen Hamish in such a place, for I am certain a career on the stage must destroy all that is best in either man or woman. Would to God he had never entered it.

“I have written a longer letter than I intended, and my candle is beginning to sputter in the socket, so I must bid you good-bye for the present, trusting you will write soon again to

Your ever loving friend,

JOANNA SINCLAIR.”

THE LAIRD AND HIS BRIDE

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE LAIRD AND HIS BRIDE.

THE news that the daughter of their late revered minister was to marry the laird of Achnacairn threw the whole community into unwonted excitement. That he had not chosen "a lady of high degree" for his bride appeared derogatory to his dignity in the estimation of a few among the county families in the neighbourhood; but among the tenantry themselves there was universal satisfaction, for the minister's daughter had endeared herself to them all, being a familiar visitor in their homes, and actively interested in all their domestic concerns. She had often accompanied her father on his rounds, and had been of practical service to him on such occasions by her shrewd perception of circumstances and situations which had escaped his notice. With real delight, therefore, they looked forward to seeing her installed as mistress of the laird's ancestral home.

Among those to whom the approaching event brought no satisfaction was the squire of Thornton, to whom his wife imparted the news one morning at breakfast. He heard it in sullen silence, but the reddening of his face, on which ill temper had imprinted its indelible record, betrayed the chagrin he felt. Since the disappointment of his fond ambition in that direction

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

others almost as aggravating had befallen him. Quarrels with his tenants and labourers were of frequent occurrence, and sour, resentful looks greeted him wherever he went. While some submitted to be brow-beaten, others, strengthened in their opposition by a too intimate acquaintance with his antecedents, openly defied him.

"I mind the day," declared one of these stalwarts, in the course of an altercation, "when it was naething wi' you but 'Doon wi' the lairds, the land belongs to the people.' But it's different noo, when ye're a landlord yersel, and wad mak' us a' yer slaves. Oor ain laird has anither way o' treatin' his folk; but he's a gentleman born, and that ye'll ne'er be gin ye had a mint o' siller."

This allusion to Sir Hector Forbes was the sting of this retort, for ere this Mr. Sinclair had discovered that the baronet no longer viewed him with any favour. What had caused the alteration in their relations he could only surmise, but he was in no doubt as to the odium he had brought upon himself by his treatment of his daughter, and he deemed it possible that Sir Hector shared the general resentment. Nevertheless he would not avail himself of the obvious means of rehabilitating himself in the estimation of the people by recalling the child he had so cruelly used and making what reparation he could. His vindictive pride would not suffer him to make such an act of restitution; still less had his wife's entreaties prevailed. She, poor woman, had braved his wrath on two occasions by visiting her daughter in Edinburgh—a defiance for which she paid dearly on her return, when she had the mortification of seeing herself insulted in the presence of her servants: although they were

THE LAIRD AND HIS BRIDE

every one her staunch allies on such occasions, and made no scruple of testifying their indignation against their boorish master. Notwithstanding those reminders that pride and selfishness must bring in their train contempt and dislike, this ill-conditioned man refused to be taught, and seemed to be only confirmed in his obstinacy by each successive warning of coming retribution.

Meanwhile he could not avoid noticing the preparations now begun at Tremhor for the advent of a mistress there. For Sir Hector had been importunate in his wish that the wedding should take place during the Parliamentary vacation, when he would have leisure for all the delightful tasks he had in prospect, when his bride should be with him to make acquaintance with the estate and its tenantry; though in many cases no introduction to the latter was likely to be required, as the minister's daughter had for many a day previously been a familiar figure among the cottages on the hillsides and in the glen. Still less could he evade the manifestations of rejoicing among the residents in the district caused by the laird's approaching nuptials. And, oh the rancour such demonstrations stirred up in that malevolent mind! To think that a poor girl of obscure position should occupy the place he had so fondly designed for his own daughter! This was wormwood and gall indeed, and it served still more to embitter his spirit.

The six months for which the bride had stipulated as an indispensable condition of her marrying at all were fast running out. The rooms in the Edinburgh home had been completely renovated, and other improvements effected for which Kitty was indebted to her brother, whose

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

fortunes, after their woeful eclipse, were beginning to brighten.

His contributions to the review aforementioned and other periodicals had attracted attention, and further openings for his work had presented themselves which promised to keep his pen busy for a good while. He had been obliged, from sheer lack of time, to discontinue his tutorial engagements and devote himself entirely to his literary work, which he seemed unwilling to quit even for necessary exercise, notwithstanding frequent remonstrances from his mother and sister.

It was on one of these occasions that Kitty, breaking into his sanctum, as the small room he had appropriated for his work was called, found him so completely lost in his occupation, that he did not notice her entrance till she laid her hand upon his shoulder, and stooping over it, asked him what he was writing.

"Oh, nothing particular, Kitty," he answered. "I wish you hadn't interrupted me: I've such a lot to do this week."

"That isn't the usual paper you write on," she remarked, disregarding his expostulation; "and what are all those lines in quotation marks? I believe you're writing a story. Yes, your blushes 'own the soft impeachment.' Oh fie, Colin! You that won't have anything to do with the fair sex, as we're falsely called! How can you do justice to lovers' trials and transports?"

"Kitty, you little inquisitive wretch!" exclaimed he, smiling despite his provocation. "You deserve a whipping for intruding on my privacy. You have no right to know what I'm doing. If I did write a story, you would supply me with

THE LAIRD AND HIS BRIDE

plenty of material in the way of feminine perversity and caprice."

"Nothing of the sort, Colin: from me, as your model, you would be able to depict an angelic heroine, charming enough to bring you thousands of readers. You could not have a better source of inspiration."

"In the meantime you inspire me to put you out of the room," retorted the novelist; and a wrestling match thereupon ensued, the last bout of which took place in the corridor outside, and was peremptorily stopped by Mrs. Munro, who came to ascertain what all the noise was about.

Such interludes had been frequent in days gone by, for this brother and sister were congenial spirits, understanding each other thoroughly. Colin's diffidence and self-depreciation had strongly appealed to the generous instincts of the sister's true and loving heart, and made her his champion on all occasions when his sensitive nature forced him to recoil from the taunts and insults that made the path of life a thorny one for him.

Unlike most brides elect, Kitty was not unduly concerned about her wedding trousseau. Sir Hector knew, she said, her circumstances, and she would not make a false appearance to please anybody. It was only in deference to his wish that she finally consented to be married in church, as she herself would much have preferred that the ceremony should be performed in her own home, in accordance with the time-honoured Scottish custom.

One special source of gratification was hers on this memorable occasion: her chosen friend and innocent rival, Joanna Sinclair, had promised to

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

be at the wedding as her bridesmaid. This glad surprise had come in a recent letter, in which that lady said she wished to show Sir Hector Forbes that she could be a better friend than a sweetheart, and that his wise choice had her full approval. She trusted that her friendship with Lady Forbes would be as firm and warm as had been her friendship with Kitty Munro.

All the preliminaries had now been arranged. Kitty was to be "given away" by her uncle Malcolm. A cousin was to be Sir Hector's groomsman. The list of invited guests had been carefully drawn out; and both Mrs. Munro and her daughter were glad that the baronet's new relations were not numerous, and that of these several were unable to accept of the invitation for various reasons more or less valid.

There was one serious exception, however, to the general satisfaction. Nothing had been heard of Hamish for a much longer period than usual, nor in the last brief note received from him had he given any clue as to his future movements. The fact that he had detached himself so thoroughly from their own home life was sufficiently recognized to lessen the apprehension caused by his silence on this occasion. The letter written by Kitty to inform him of her engagement had not been acknowledged—a circumstance which convinced them all that it had not reached him; for no one doubted that Hamish would have answered such an intimation in a fitting way. Of course his unsettled mode of life accounted for his not receiving the intelligence. Nevertheless, the mother's heart was ill at ease despite her efforts at cheerfulness.

Apart from this distracting suspense, she would

THE LAIRD AND HIS BRIDE

have found cheerfulness a most difficult achievement at this time, for the loss of her daughter's companionship promised to be no small deprivation, and she could not blind herself to the fact that the difference between her own position and that which Kitty would occupy as Sir Hector's wife must to some extent entail separation.

The momentous day, however, was drawing near, and amid the bustle of preparation she found a certain relief from sad thoughts. Wedding gifts began to pour in, some of them handsome enough to awe their recipient. Letters of congratulation from friends at a distance arrived with every post.

The wedding dress awaited the grand occasion, and the bride's trousseau—a very modest one—was now complete. The invited guests were arriving in town, and Sir Hector himself had taken up his quarters at one of the hotels.

It was a fair September morning, bright and clear, when the little company assembled in the church that had so often heard Mr. Munro's earnest pleadings during the long years of his ministry in the capital. Leaning on her uncle's arm, and followed by her bridesmaid, her mother, and brother, Kitty, looking very pretty in her "snowy array," her tear-bedewed cheek visible beneath her veil, walked down the aisle to the spot where "the priest and bridegroom awaited the bride."

Handsome indeed looked Sir Hector Forbes in his Highland dress and ornaments, and more than one of the spectators that day—for the church was filled by a promiscuous crowd—envied Kitty her bridegroom.

The ceremony, impressive in its very simplicity, and hallowed by the solemn words that made them

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

one till death should part them, was brought to a conclusion by the placing of the ring on the bride's finger by her husband.

Then followed a part of the ceremony which must have been trying to the two actors in it, brought thus face to face at a moment that could not but recall to both a closed chapter in their lives. As Sir Hector, somewhat awkwardly, was raising the bride's veil, Joanna, with her sweet smile and blushing face, stepped forward to assist him, as he kissed away those rebellious tears from his bride's cheek.

One after another then came forward with caresses and congratulations, which were an ordeal for poor Kitty, who had never before been the object of so much attention, and felt completely overwhelmed and out of her element. But when, first of all the train, her mother advanced to embrace her, a flood of tears burst forth, and it looked as though these entwined arms would never unloose.

Making her way as best she could through the throng, Aillie now presented herself, and with a sob in her voice said:

"Fare ye weel, Miss Katrine—no, I mean Leddy Forbes. May the Lord bless ye!"

The signing of the register in the vestry followed, then the guests adjourned to the wedding feast at the bridegroom's hotel, which he had insisted on providing, knowing well how impossible such an outlay was for Mrs. Munro.

The customary speeches were made, toasts were drunk, and that strange intermixture of joy and sadness that seems inseparable from a marriage celebration pervaded this one also.

The young couple presently appeared, equipped

THE LAIRD AND HIS BRIDE

for their wedding trip. They were at once surrounded by all the guests and pelted with showers of "bachels" and rice, from which they sought shelter in the coach that was to carry them on the first stage of their journey.

But as she stood on the doorstep before entering it, bidding farewell to her mother and Joanna, the young bride looked round, asking:

"Where is Colin?"

Thus summoned from the rear, where he had been hiding himself, her brother came forward with a very shamefaced air, and was smothered with embraces.

But the bridegroom, who had withstood the assault of old shoes and rice with praiseworthy good humour, was waiting for release, and now drew his bride's arm within his own and led her to the carriage. The smiling coachman, adorned with a fine "favour," brandished his whip over the heads of his gaily caparisoned horses, and amid loud cheers and fluttering handkerchiefs the equipage rolled off with its happy occupants.

Sir Hector had made royal provision for his guests, and nothing was lacking that money could provide. Like every other festivity, however, it came to an end, and the company dispersed.

Among the last to leave were Mrs. Munro and Colin.

"How you'll miss Kitty, Mrs. Munro," cried Joanna Sinclair. "But she won't be too far away from you, and you'll see her often, I'm sure; for I know she'll want you, even though she's married. She'll always be the same Kitty. And then you have always Colin."

"Oh yes, my dear, what you say is quite true: I know I haven't lost my daughter," she replied;

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

"and as for Colin, some sons are as good as daughters."

The quiet smile that accompanied these words lent them a peculiar emphasis; and as next minute the individual in question advanced to escort his mother to their home, Joanna looked at him with an earnestness that brought a flush on his cheek.

"Goodbye, Colin," she said. "I won't tell you what your mother was saying about you: it might make you too vain. But I'll say this: I know you'll be as good a son to her as Kitty was a daughter; and that is saying a good deal."

"I'll try to do my duty at any rate," was the quiet reply.

CHAPTER XXX.

BROUGHT LOW.

A YEAR had passed since that eventful day that transferred the minister's daughter from her humble home to a baronet's mansion. The old house at Achnacairn had now a young mistress, who brought a brightness into it that had been lacking for almost a generation. All the visitors who came to welcome her to her new home were conscious of the transformation at a glance; and those among them who had entertained doubts as to how she would carry herself under her new dignities, found themselves reassured by the good breeding which had well qualified her for her position as the laird's wife.

But, pleasant and affable though many of Sir Hector's kin were, they were yet strangers, and time alone could bring cordiality. From the beginning of her residence there the young wife had resolved that her husband's relations should find her ready to foster the friendship that had subsisted between him and them — a wise resolution, the neglect of which has in many similar cases produced life-long alienation. On the other hand, she as decidedly resented the condescension that would have put her in the position of an inferior; and none guilty of the attempt cared to repeat it.

There was one guest, however, at Tremhor for

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

whom arrangements of a special kind were made: this was Mrs. Munro. It had required a good deal of perseverance on Kitty's part to induce her mother to pay this first visit, for with her keen sense of delicacy, the mother-in-law shrank from even the appearance of intrusion; and when at last she came, her diffidence distressed both Kitty and her husband, who so sincerely wished that she should look upon Tremhor as another home. No less disposed was she to gratify them, and the lively interest she shewed in the elegance and beauty of the house and its surroundings gave them pleasure. With becoming pride her son-in-law conducted her over his ancestral acres, informing her of various improvements he was inaugurating, and pointing out the beauties of the landscape, which could only be seen from this coign of vantage, and therefore new to her.

On those excursions she was pleased to observe the genuinely friendly greetings that awaited him wherever he went: a convincing proof that he and his tenantry understood one another.

Indoors there was no end to the tours of inspection among the treasures and heirlooms of centuries, each with its record of personages and deeds that had made history. Of those Sir Hector had reminiscences that seemed endless, and furnished entertainment for many a social hour. His pride in his progenitors had something noble in it, and as he recounted some stirring episodes in which they had figured, his eye would flash and his voice vibrate with true Highland spirit, that lent him a dignity and charm which were a revelation to Mrs. Munro.

But far beyond all the satisfaction afforded by those things was the assurance that the young

BROUGHT LOW

husband and wife were happy in each other's love. There had been anxious moments in Mrs. Munro's mind when she contemplated her daughter in circumstances so new, and demanding an experience utterly lacking in her case. The fear that she might be haughtily received by her husband's kinsfolk preyed on her mind; for she dreaded the consequences for both. This first visit, however, had dissipated all such forebodings; and when it came to an end and she returned to her own humble abode, it was with a satisfied, thankful heart.

Colin had been included in that invitation, but such a visit would have been a species of torture to him, and he was glad that his exacting work provided an escape from the ordeal. In vain had his sister besought him to come and inspect her beautiful home. His reply was ever the same: he would not have either her or her husband see him insulted by their servants.

"What servant would dare to insult a brother of mine?" demanded Kitty indignantly.

"They would not allow you to see it," he replied; "but you could not prevent them laughing at me behind my back."

Deeply engrossing had his work become, for it appeared as though Fortune was about to atone for her surly treatment of him hitherto and smile upon him at last. Editors were now less disdainful and autocratic, while the critics had astonished him by their eulogies on his literary productions. Better still, his labours were beginning to produce a harvest. It was now his privilege to be able to support his mother in comfort.

"Look here, mother," he would say, as he placed some money in her hands, "what do you

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

think of the fruits of my pen? I'll soon be as rich as Cræsus."

Her smile of pleasure delighted his honest soul more than the money, welcome though it was to one whose only source of wealth was his work.

Like the true-hearted, gallant gentleman he was, Sir Hector had generously offered such a provision for his mother-in-law as would have placed her above the risk of pecuniary straits; but with the spirit of independence characteristic of her race, she declined that kind offer. That she should be thought to have thrown herself upon the charity of her son-in-law was abhorrent to her very nature; and Colin strenuously seconded her decision, proud of his own ability to shield her from penury and the privations in its train.

The vacancy in the home circle was still painfully felt, for Kitty was one of those delightful people who seem to carry sunshine with them wherever they go; and that brightness was sorely missed. Yet mother and son were very happy. Colin's increasing success in his literary work had a marked influence on his whole demeanour, making him a cheerful companion and hopeful as he never before had been.

But where is the draught of earthly happiness that has not a bitter ingredient?

The occasional letters which they had hitherto been receiving from Hamish had now for nearly four months entirely ceased to come. At first, aware of the migratory life of his profession, they assigned this as the reason of his silence, dissatisfied though they were; but, as week after week passed without bringing any communication from him, anxiety deepened into the conviction that some untoward event had occurred to prevent

BROUGHT LOW

his writing. Such enquiries as Colin had been able to make brought no more satisfactory intelligence.

Nor was this suspense confined to themselves. Several times had Joanna visited them, and it was evident that she came in quest of news of one whom she had never forgotten; but each time she had to go away without any relief from the dread that had taken possession of her as to his fate.

Apprehension was daily becoming more unbearable, and poor Mrs. Munro was visibly declining in health, when at last a letter addressed in an unknown hand arrived. Only those in like circumstances can understand what it costs to open and read such letters. The mother's trembling fingers could scarcely perform their task, and a mist swam before her eyes. She handed the missive to Colin, who unfolded the sheet and read aloud the contents written in feeble pencilled characters:

“ The Infirmary,
N—,
7th March, 18—.

Dear Mother,

You may not have heard of the fire at the theatre here four months since, when the whole place was burnt to the ground, and many people were killed. I was helping to rescue some of the victims, and got myself badly injured by some blazing rafters that fell where I was, and I am afraid I have lost the sight of one of my eyes. It is with the greatest difficulty that I can scrawl these few lines, but I knew, if you had heard of this, you would be tormenting yourself about me, since you had not heard from me for so long. I would have

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

written sooner, but I was enduring such pain, and was often unconscious; and even when I so far recovered that I might have sent a message, I thought it kinder to you to wait till I could give you news that would not alarm you too much. For I am slowly recovering, and the doctors say I may be allowed out of bed in another week or so. I can write no more. Please let me hear from you.

Your loving, though unworthy son,

HAMISH."

Pale and agitated, Mrs. Munro spoke not a word for a few minutes, then, rising from her chair, and trembling from head to foot, she said:

"Colin, I must go to him at once. Let me know how soon I can get to N——."

"Mother, let me go for you," he proposed. "I can be ready so much sooner, and it's a tedious journey for you."

But no dissuasion could alter her decision; and knowing how unaccustomed his mother was to travelling, Colin announced that he would accompany her. Accordingly, a few hours later they were on their journey, relieved, despite their anxiety, to know that the object of it all was alive and within their reach to succour him.

The records which pain inscribes on the memory time cannot obliterate; and that journey, even to its minutest details, remained vivid in the minds of those travellers to the end of their lives.

Next day saw them on their way to the great, gloomy building they were in quest of. Their arrival at that hour was inconvenient, indeed contrary to the rules of the establishment in regard

BROUGHT LOW.

to visitors, but Colin's representations overcame this objection, and they were admitted.

The nurse who came to conduct them to the ward in which Hamish lay suggested that only one should see him at this first interview, in case of undue excitement to the patient, and Mrs. Munro accordingly followed the nurse alone, Colin waiting outside till her return.

She had never before been within the walls of a hospital, and the mere spectacle of those rows of beds, each with its sufferer, would have affected her sympathetic nature; but as she searched the lines of faces for one that was dear to her, she was wellnigh overcome, and but for her habit of self-repression she might have given way altogether at that testing moment.

Before reaching the bed on which her son lay her conductress bade her stop for a minute, while she went to acquaint him with her visit. Hamish apparently was asleep, for she saw the nurse bend over him gently and watch until he moved. Then there was an instantaneous start, and his hand was raised as if to remove the bandage on his brow; but the nurse's intervening hand prevented it, and he raised himself upon his pillow, which she propped up for his support, whispering a word of caution, ere she returned to the waiting mother.

It was well for her that she had her feelings so thoroughly under control at that moment, for, as she stood by her son's bedside and marked the woeful change in his appearance, and felt his eager, clinging grip of her hand, she could not utter a word, and despite her efforts, hot tears fell upon his cheek as she stooped down and kissed it. Neither could he find voice to do more than breathe the one word, "Mother." It was a solemn

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

moment—one of those into which are crowded the thoughts and feelings of years.

Mrs. Munro was the first to break that sacred silence. Her self-command had returned, and she could now speak calmly. But oh, how sweet was the sound of her voice, that brought back with a rush the memories of childhood's innocence and the joys of home!

"Are you suffering much pain, dear?" she asked, just as he remembered hearing her ask when she stood at his bedside in the familiar nursery during an illness he had had in his boyhood.

"Not so much now, mother," he answered; and his hand again sought to raise the bandage over his eyes, as he added: "Oh, I wish I could look at you! I have wearied for a glimpse of your face all through those dark, dreary days. Are you well, mother—really well?"

"Yes, Hamish, I am quite well," she assured him. "It's you I'm thinking of. Tell me, dear, what the doctors say about your eye: is it very much injured?"

"Yes, mother: they don't give me much hope that I'll see with it. They want to make sure that the injury won't affect the other eye. It would be terrible to be blind."

"May God avert it!" exclaimed the mother, with a full heart and tones more eloquent than the words.

Those words appeared to touch him, and he was silent for a minute or two, then in a more animated spirit he asked:

"How are Kitty and Colin? It seems an age since I heard from them."

"They are both well, Hamish," replied Mrs.

BROUGHT LOW

Munro. "Kitty is very happy in her new home, and has as kind a husband as ever woman had. Colin is here: he would insist on coming with me, though I would——"

"Here, mother, in the hospital?" he interrupted. "Oh, bring him in, I want to see him."

Mrs. Munro explained that this visit was to be limited to one, but that his brother would probably be permitted to see him next day.

The answer evidently disappointed him, but he changed the subject, and began talking of his sister, in whom he seemed to be specially interested.

"Were you surprised at the marriage?" he asked. "Surely it was a sudden affair? The laird, at one time at least, had another bride in his eye. Do you think Kitty really cared for him?"

"There's no doubt about that, Hamish," was the prompt reply, "though none of us suspected it. She kept the secret to herself jealously, even at the time when it must have been hard to conceal it from Joanna Sinclair, for she was in her confidence, and knew from her how anxious Sir Hector had been to marry Joanna."

Hamish seemed lost in his own reflections. Presently he enquired:

"Is Joanna still with those people in Edinburgh?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Munro: "her father has never relented, and she is an outcast from her own home. Mrs. Sinclair is not allowed even to visit her, poor woman."

"What a hardened wretch that man is!" cried Hamish. "How he ever happened to have such

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

a girl as Joanna for his daughter is a standing mystery. He was never worthy to blacken her shoes."

A flush was deepening on the hollow cheek, betokening the excitement which this subject had produced, and Mrs. Munro, perceiving it, was rising to take her departure when the nurse returned to intimate that the time allowed for the interview had expired. A glance at her patient's face convinced her that she had not come too soon.

"You'll come again to-morrow, mother, and bring Colin?" pleaded Hamish.

"If nurse here gives her sanction," answered Mrs. Munro, with a questioning glance at that lady.

"I think you may look for that, Mr. Munro," was the reassuring reply: and releasing her hand from that tenacious grip, the mother left the ward and rejoined her other son, whose patience had been pretty nearly exhausted by her unexpectedly long absence.

"What do you think of Hamish?" was his immediate query. "Is he much injured?"

"More, I think, than he allowed me to know," replied Mrs. Munro: "but he seems more distressed about his eyesight than his other injuries. He fears he will lose the sight of one of his eyes. I pray that may not be, for the loss of even one would be an irreparable misfortune, especially to one like him. He is anxious to see you, Colin, and the nurse thinks you may go with me to-morrow."

"I wonder why he should be anxious to see me," rejoined Colin.

"He'll tell you that to-morrow," said Mrs. Munro. "But now what are we to do in this busy town, where we have not a single acquaintance we

BROUGHT LOW

could visit? Well, in the first place, I must write to Kitty, for if she should hear that we left home so hurriedly she'll be imagining all sorts of dreadful things. What do you mean to do, Colin?"

"I brought some work with me that I must finish," he replied.

Both accordingly betook themselves to the hotel, and as the weather proved wet and uninviting, they remained indoors for the rest of that day.

That interview with the son over whom she had wept such bitter tears had cost Mrs. Munro intense agitation. As she sat apart in the crowded saloon, watching the various groups who passed in and out, all intent on pleasure or business, they appeared to her the denizens of another world, so sharp the contrast they presented to the world she was familiar with. Were those the sort of people, she wondered, with whom her son had associated, and who had gathered nightly to admire his performances on the stage? To her whose life had been spent almost entirely in the quietude of the country this revelation of the fashionable world was a memorable experience. It appalled her by its complete dissociation from all her conceptions of a life befitting the creatures of a day, as regards this world, and yet with immortal spirits. And yet this was the world her son had chosen to spend his life in! She longed to get away from it all.

Little sleep visited her eyelids that night, and she welcomed the daylight, shrouded though it was in the mist that overhung the city. A few hours later saw her and her son on their way to the hospital.

On arriving there the nurse who had attended them the previous day informed them that her

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

patient had requested to see his brother alone for a few minutes, if Mrs. Munro would wait. Of course this was at once agreed to, and Colin followed his guide down the ward to the bed on which Hamish lay.

The meeting between them was quiet and unemotional. Hamish stretched out his hand with a firm clasp, saying:

"I'm glad you've come, Colin, for I have things to tell you that I can't speak of to mother yet, at least. Sit down: I think there's a chair for you. You see, I'm in the dark."

Endowed with feelings as keen and deep as any woman's, Colin could hardly control himself at sight of his brother in such a woeful condition, and tears started to his eyes, and were perceptible in the tones of his voice when at last he spoke.

"This is a sore change for you, Hamish," he said. "You should have told us long ago, and we would have been here."

"I knew that, Colin," was the answer; "but mother would tell you why I didn't. And now, as I'm not allowed much time for talking, let me tell you why I wished to see you. I have been a fool in every way, and in money as well as in the rest. I have squandered a great part of the money uncle Murdo left me by gambling and making myself security for one I trusted, but who played me false. I have still some left. I don't know how much. My affairs are in a solicitor's hands, and if you would write to him for me it would be an immense favour. I'll tell you what to say. Have you paper and pencil with you? If not, the nurse will fetch them."

Colin produced his pocket-book and wrote down the words his brother dictated, and which he

BROUGHT LOW

read aloud at the close, to make sure that all was correct. Hamish thanked him, and seemed greatly relieved when assured that the letter would be despatched that day.

This transaction concluded, Colin went to fetch his mother, who had been accommodated with a seat in an adjoining waiting-room.

There was enough of the patient's face visible to show the smile of pleasure that broke over it as his mother bent over him and kissed his cheek. No reference to the mournful past was allowed to mar the satisfaction of the interchange of kindly thought. The time for that must come, but not yet.

It was with much reluctance that they separated on the approach of the nurse, who came to announce that one of the doctors had come to examine his patient; but the parting was relieved by the prospect of another meeting on the morrow.

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE RECALL.

A WEEK had passed, each day of which had found the mother and her two sons at that bedside in the hospital.

Colin could not prolong his absence, and in order to fulfil his engagements, he was obliged to leave Mrs. Munro and return to Edinburgh. She, on her part, had decided to remain until the doctors could say with certainty whether her son's sight might be preserved and his wounds thoroughly healed.

Other issues surpassing even those hinged upon their verdict; and the suspense endured by that mother's heart, which had never ceased to yearn over her first born, the son of whom she had been so proud, became daily more painful as time went on. The one all-absorbing question as to his future had not yet been broached between them, and she shrank from even alluding to it, lest the result should be the blasting of a hope reborn.

A second week was in its course when one day on entering the ward, the friendly nurse met her with a smile, saying:

"I think you'll see an improvement in your son to-day, Mrs. Munro."

With an eager step she approached his bedside, then suddenly stopped and burst into tears; for, with the bandage that had concealed his face removed, and only one eye still covered, there lay

THE RECALL

her handsome boy, every feature lighted up with a joy that appeared almost overwhelming. Next moment he was folded to her breast, her tears falling in a shower on his face.

The nurse, deeply affected, withdrew, and they were left alone. Then, when they were both calm enough to speak, Hamish said:

“Mother, I have good news for you. The doctors think that my injured eye may yet be saved, and there’s no danger to the other; so I’m free from the terrible dread I had of being blinded for life and made a burden to everybody. Thank God for His mercy!”

That last ejaculation, uttered in accents of intense emotion, opened the floodgates through which the torrent of pent-up feeling rushed now unchecked.

“Mother, dry your eyes,” cried Hamish, “and listen to the story I have been wishing to tell you, but had not the courage. Sit down and give me your hand, for its very touch will help me; and it’s a long story, though I’ll try to make it as short as I can.

I’ll begin at the beginning. At college, as you know, I met Charles Turnbull, and we became fast friends. His upbringing was the reverse of mine, and he made me feel inferior, as if I had really been reared in a hermitage, and knew nothing of the world. His family were gay people with not a thought beyond this world; but they treated me most kindly and even flattered me. They introduced me to amusements that were all new to me; but the first visit I paid with them to the theatre was my undoing. The fascination of the stage simply enthralled me, and by degrees overcame all restraint: I resolved to be an actor. My

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

studies at the Hall became hateful, until I could no longer support the disguise I had been wearing as a candidate for the ministry.

I frankly confessed all this to my father, as you know, and a more cruel ordeal I hope I may never face than that night when I had to destroy the hope he had built upon me. Yet, mother, bitterly as I regret the disappointment he suffered, I could not have entered the ministry of the Church as I then was without being an arrant hypocrite. I had never really contemplated the ministry in the true spirit. At college I had gained some distinction, and was flattered accordingly. I was proud of my achievements and abilities, and, had I been ordained, the pulpit would only have been a place for the display of my powers: that and nothing more. I had no spiritual endowments such as all must have who would succeed in that calling.

In my struggles of conscience I fortified myself with this argument, when I finally quitted it and followed my own bent; but I never had peace of mind afterwards in spite of the applause I won on the stage. I cannot speak of that. It was a life I shudder to think of now; but once in it, I saw no escape. I had seen the realities so well disguised on the stage, and these counteracted all the allurements of a dangerous profession. I became more and more dissatisfied, especially after father's death, and wished to free myself from an environment that threatened to destroy all that is best in human life.

The hour of emancipation came in a dreadful form. I wish I could forget the scene of that awful night when the theatre was being devoured by the flames, and hundreds of frantic people were

THE RECALL

struggling for life, and some had met their doom. I thought I was to be one of them when that blazing beam crashed down upon me, and for the first moment I could not extricate myself. Death stared me in the face, and I knew I was not prepared to meet it. O mother! that was the most terrible moment I ever experienced. Thank God! I was not summoned to my account then. I have been given space for repentance, and I hope I have made a right use of it. At any rate, I have resolved that the rest of my life shall be an atonement, as far as that is possible, for the past. By God's grace I feel that I can now serve Him in the work of the ministry; and if the Church will receive me, I'll devote myself to its grand mission. I could now preach as the man must preach who seeks to win men from sin to righteousness, because I myself have found pardon and peace."

That peace seemed to brood on the penitent's face as he ended and lay back exhausted with the effort which such a confession cost him.

Tears were coursing down his mother's cheeks, but they were tears of thankful joy—a joy too full for utterance. Those were solemn, sacred moments of silence that followed, and both seemed reluctant to break it. A flood of thoughts was rushing upon the mother's heart, making speech impossible. Thus "after many days" the prayers she had poured forth with cries of strong pleading had won an answer. Oh, if only her husband could have been present to listen to that story of repentance, how would his heart have rejoiced! Had it reached his ears in that upper-world, where "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth"?

"Our Heavenly Father has given you back to

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

us, Hamish," were her first words, "and now my heart is at rest."

"You're sure you forgive me, mother?" he pleaded.

For answer she stooped down and kissed him.

"You'll come home with me, Hamish?" she said.

"To be a burden on you, mother?" he rejoined.

"No: to be a blessing."

"But, mother, did Colin tell you about the money I lost?"

"No, dear; but he won't grudge helping you as long as you need help. Perhaps you don't know that he is getting known as a writer, and is able to support us both with his earnings."

"But he lost all his own money through that unconscionable publisher in London, and he cannot be making a great deal by writing for papers and periodicals. And besides, mother, how could I be so mean as encroach on his earnings? Oh, what a fool I have been!"

"Dismiss those scruples, Hamish. Your being with us won't make a great difference in our expenditure; and when you are settled in a manse of your own, you'll return our hospitality."

A smile broke over the pale face.

"That's a bright hope, mother," he said: "and if that should ever be, your home and Colin's will be the manse."

Whether Mrs. Munro thought of other possible inmates, she did not hint at the contingency, too happy in the prospect of their being reunited in the Edinburgh home; for which she lost no time in preparing, eagerly awaiting the day when permission would be given by the doctor for their patient's removal.

THE RECALL

A long epistle was indited that same evening to Colin, telling in her own simple way what she had heard from Hamish at that memorable interview, and apprising him of the happy issue.

She had several instructions for Aillie, to be carried out in view of the near arrival of herself and her son; instructions which sent that damsel into transports of delight, and resulted in what her mistress neither desired nor expected: viz., a cleaning from which Colin suffered for a week afterwards.

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

CHAPTER XXXII.

A CLEANING AND A COURTSHIP.

IT was during the course of this upheaval that an unlooked for visitor arrived at Mrs. Munro's house in the person of Donald Cameron from Achnacairn.

Attired in garments befitting her occupation, Aillie opened the door, and at the sight of him gasped with consternation; or, as she expressed it, his appearance "took her breath awa'."

Donald's face was aglow with pleasure, notwithstanding the scene of confusion into which he was ushered, and Aillie's "unadorned" beauty. In answer to her query as to what had brought him to Edinburgh he informed her that he had obtained a situation as groom with a family in the town at a more lucrative wage than he could expect at Achnacairn. The improvement in his appearance, due in large measure to his smart livery, impressed Aillie favourably, and she invited him to take the first seat available, and which had to be extricated from a pile.

This interruption to the urgent demands of a cleaning appeared to disconcert her less than might have been expected; although she deemed it necessary to remind him that she had no time to *partle*. And when her visitor proceeded to retail all the most recent gossip of Achnacairn, she found herself too much interested to think of the cleaning at all. He had much to tell her of

A CLEANING AND A COURTSHIP

Thornton and its master and the constant feuds between him and the neighbouring farmers, several of whom had voluntarily quitted their holdings rather than submit to his exactions and arbitrary dealings; while others contented themselves with braving his displeasure and telling him truths he could not dispute. Indeed, he had made himself so unpopular by those overbearing proceedings, that his very name became a byword for tyranny and oppression.

But all this ill-repute was surpassed by the odium he had incurred through his treatment of his daughter, driven from her home penniless. Donald had heard from the servants a few things he did not care to repeat in regard to his domestic relations.

"We wad a' hae likeit Miss Sinclair to mairry the laird," Donald continued, "for she's baith 'blithe and bonny,' as the auld sang says; an' puir lassie, she tint her he'rt to ane that wasna worthy o't; but the laird has gotten a wife that has brocht him better than siller or a lang pedigree. Ye ken wha that is?"

"Ay, do I," promptly assented Aillie, "he couldna hae gotten a better gin he had seekit a' the warld; though it's been an unco loss to us. The hoose isna the same ava withoot Miss Katrine."

"What's ado here, Aillie?" enquired Donald, surveying the bewildering combinations of furniture and the carpetless floor.

"I hae my news tae, ye see," she replied. "Ye'll no jalouse what has happened."

"Weel, tell me."

"Maister Hamish is comin' back. Ay, it's true. He was near killed in an awfu' fire at a theatre

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

he was actin' in, an' he's been lying in a hospital, a' burnt an' sair hurt. The mistress an' Maister Colin got news o't frae himsel', an' gaed awa to him afore I kent whaur I was. But they're bringin' him hame, an' I'm warstlin' to get the hoose a' ready for them afore Tuesday. So ye manna taigle me, Donald. Will I bring ye a cup o' tea, laddie?"

"I wadna refuse it," was the reply; and in a short time the beverage was produced, with some bread and cheese; and while the visitor regaled himself, Aillie feigned to be busy about her work, though still contriving to keep up conversation.

The refreshment appeared to fortify the young Highlander for making an announcement that arrested Aillie like an electric shock.

"Gin ye had speir'd, I could hae telt ye anither reason that brocht me to Edinbro," he said,—"yersel, Aillie."

The brush dropped from the girl's hand, and her ruddy face grew ruddier still, as she at last replied:

"Ye're no blate, Donald Cameron, to say the like o' that to me. Do ye think I'm sic a gowk as lippen to ony man, saft-spoken though they be. Na, na: I ken them owre weel. Ye needna try to come owre me wi' sic daffin'. I hae a gude hame here, an' kind folk to serve. I ken whaur I am owre weel to leave them for ony man."

This rebuff might have daunted a bolder wooer, and for the first moment Donald looked very crestfallen, but a glance at his charmer's face re-animated him sufficiently to plead:

"I'm no askin' ye to leave them eenoo, lassie. I haena gathered the siller I maun hae afore I tak' a wife. A' I ask is that ye'll gie me a promise

A CLEANING AND A COURTSHIP

to wait till I hae a bield to offer ye, an' no think o' anither lad."

"'Deed, I'll mak' nae sic promise," was the retort. "Wha kens but ye'll change yer mind an' be coortin' anither lass ahint my back afore ye're muckle aulder."

"Ye little cuttie!" cried the lover, and next moment Aillie was caught in his strong arms, and a struggle ensued, amid which a pyramid of chairs rattled to the ground, making such a din, that neither of the wrestlers heard the door bell ring till a third peal, longer and louder than the others, brought them to a stand, and Aillie, in a state of confusion, went to answer the summons.

There stood Miss Sinclair, at sight of whom the girl felt as guilty as a thief caught in the act.

"May I come in, Aillie?" asked the intruder, wondering at her toozled appearance, which seemed quite in keeping with the general aspect of the house.

"It's an awfu like hoose for ony body to come into," apologised Aillie, "but come awa ben to the parlour: it's the only room ye could sit doon in. Maister Colin wadna let me meddle wi' his papers or touch onything in't."

"Do you think he'll be home soon?" enquired Joanna, following to the apartment in question. "I would like to see him."

"Ay, mem, he'll be in sune, if ye can wait."

"I can wait for half-an-hour, but not longer. But, Aillie, tell me when do you expect Mrs. Munro to be home?"

"Maister Colin says they're comin' on Friday, and maybe he'll gang an' bring them hame."

Miss Sinclair seemed to hesitate before she next enquired: "And, Aillie, are they all well?"

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

"Wha are ye meanin', Miss Sinclair?" rejoined Aillie.

"Why, of course, Mrs. Munro and Mr. Hamish," answered Joanna, a traitorous blush on her cheek.

"They maun baith be weel, or they wadna be comin' hame," was the indisputable reply, accompanied by a shrewd glance which deepened the incriminating blush on Joanna's face.

"I won't detain you, Aillie," she said, "for I see you're head-over-ears in work. I'll wait here for a little on the chance of seeing Mr. Colin, while you can go on with your work."

The half-hour had nearly expired, during which the sound of voices in the kitchen had apprised Joanna of the presence of another visitor to the house; and she had risen to depart when Colin made his appearance. He came quickly into the room, but started and coloured at sight of Joanna.

"You didn't expect to find me here, Colin," she said, "did you?" with the frank sweet smile that lent her such grace. "But, you know, I look upon myself as a privileged person here, being an intimate friend of Lady Forbes."

"You're always welcome here, Joanna," returned Colin, placing the chair she had occupied before her. "I hope you won't be frightened away by me. Please sit down."

"But I ought to be going, Colin," she demurred: "my pupils will be waiting for their truant governess. However, I'll stay just for a few minutes. I had a letter from Kitty," she continued, "with most unexpected news, and I wanted to ask you about it. Tell me, Colin, is Hamish very much hurt? Kitty says he will always be lame: is that really true?"

A CLEANING AND A COURTSHIP

"The doctors think so," he replied; "but that is a light misfortune compared with the other that threatened—I mean the loss of his sight. That was what caused us all such dread."

"Yes, I know that, Colin. We may be very thankful: it would have been terrible if he had been blinded."

Joanna paused again, and it was with difficulty that she could frame her next question:

"Colin, is it really true that Hamish is so greatly changed? Did you think so yourself when you were with him?"

"You may rest satisfied on that point," was the answer: "the change is too marked to be mistaken."

"Then he has severed his connexion with the stage?"

"Entirely."

"But what does he intend to do?"

"In the meantime he is coming home to live with us here. Mother told me he intends to offer himself a candidate for the ministry."

Joanna's features quivered, and her voice faltered as she said:

"O Colin, do you think he will? Is he really so changed as to do that?"

"It was his own confession," he returned; "and I know he would not have said such a thing unless he had meant it, for Hamish was always frank and straightforward."

Tears were falling from Joanna's eyes, and she could not speak.

Colin's gaze was fixed upon her face, which had never appeared so fair as at that moment; and had she chanced to look up, she would have been struck by the strange expression on his. It was

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

sad, wistful, almost solemn; and his lips were compressed as if in pain. She never saw it, however, and when she had dried her eyes and started to her feet, a spirit of cheerfulness rang in her voice as she said:

"O Colin, you can't think how happy this good news has made me; for you know, as Kitty's friend, and being so intimate with you all, I share your happiness, just as I have shared your sorrows. Please keep this visit secret, Colin," she added earnestly, as she held out her hand. "Perhaps I shouldn't have come; only I was so eager to hear all you could tell me. Goodbye."

She was gone, and Colin returned to his workshop, as he called it, where a litter of books and papers covered table and chairs, which Aillie now approached with fear and trembling, to clear a space for the frugal meal that sufficed her abstemious master.

Her glance at his face during these preparations detected a reflection of the thoughts that overwhelmed him then, and her astute mind formed its own conjecture as to what those thoughts were. Fain would she have given it utterance, but she recognised instinctively that into this sanctuary she dared not intrude. And as during the remainder of that day she watched him immersed in his work, she wondered what there could be in books and writing to make anyone so regardless of the realities of life in the shape of love and matrimony—topics which were fast assuming a surpassing importance in her eyes, especially since the visit that morning of young Donald Cameron.

REUNION

CHAPTER XXXIII.

REUNION.

THE cleaning, carried successfully through all its stages, had now ended to Aillie's entire satisfaction. Even Colin's sanctum had been surreptitiously invaded during his absence on the journey to N—, without serious consequences; and as the energetic worker passed from room to room for a final review of the reformation she had accomplished, she felt that virtue was indeed its own reward—a precept from her copybook at school which somehow lived in her memory.

The important day had now arrived, and the preparations for the evening meal were well advanced, when, to her annoyance, a loud ring announced a visitor, who proved to be no other than Donald Cameron. Despite a reception far from encouraging, the undaunted suitor made himself at home in the kitchen, contenting himself with watching his sweetheart's culinary skill, from which he augured much comfort for himself in future. For, though boldly assured that his chosen partner in life had “ta'en a scunner at him,” he persisted in his devotion, pretty sure of eventual victory. On this occasion, however, he had sense to perceive that his presence was inconvenient; and Aillie declared that she would not have her mistress come home and find a man in the house, even though it was Donald Cameron, for all the husbands in the world; so that he must

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

prepare to evacuate the premises without more ado.

"You're a saucy queen, Aillie," he protested after this summary dismissal. "I hae a gude mind to tak' anither lass, wha wad set mair store by me than ye do."

"Weel, I'm suir ye're welcome!" was the retort. "I canna be fashed wi' men aye traikin' after me."

"An' what wad ye say if I gied *that* to anither lass?" rejoined the lover, producing from its wrappings a plain gold band, which he held up for her admiration.

This sudden, adroit stroke went home. Aillie could not disguise the smile of complacency that made her homely visage peculiarly attractive at that moment; and turning to advantage this hopeful indication, he seized her hand and forced the ring upon one of her fingers.

"Ay, ye see it fits, Aillie, an' I'll slip it on ane o' thae days, afore the meenister, an' it'll no' come aff in a hurry."

"Oh, dinna be sae suir o' that, ye conceited carl," was the reply. "Ye're no' the only lad that wad like to do the same."

"Ye wee lee-er!" cried the unabashed swain; and next moment Aillie paid pleasing penance for her rudeness in a tussle that left her face scarlet.

It had not cooled when at last she forcibly expelled the recalcitrant wooer, and went to repair the damage done to her cap and apron before the arrival of Mrs. Munro and her sons.

Not even the recent lively interview evoked such excitement as she experienced when the summons brought her to the door, and the three travellers entered. From each she received a kindly

REUNION

greeting; but when she saw the tall, handsome figure of the master she had always admired so much stooping low, and observed his halting steps, tears came into her eyes. It was no time for tears, however, and she bustled about, getting everything ready for the evening meal, on which she had expended much care.

Such a reunion was bound to be overshadowed by recollections of the past. There was a deep sadness on the face of Hamish, as he took the place at the table which his father would have filled had he been still with them. He spoke little, and as his eye roved over the room that presented so marked a contrast to those of their former home, his thoughts were reflected on his face.

Mrs. Munro saw that he was strongly affected, and with a mother's tact tried to divert his attention to present interests. Fortunately a letter was awaiting her from Kitty, which she read aloud. The principal news was that she was coming to Edinburgh for a few days during the following week, and would be glad if a room could be spared for her use on her visit. Incidentally she mentioned that she had learnt the day of their homecoming from Joanna Sinclair.

An instantaneous change passed over Hamish's face at the mention of that name. His mother saw it: Colin also did; but the effect upon each was strikingly different.

The meal ended, Hamish made a tour of the house, recognizing in every corner relics of the manse at Achnacairn. None escaped his notice, and each recalled some incident of those bygone days, of which he spoke with a tenderness that brought both pain and pleasure to his mother's heart.

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

But the most trying moment for him was yet to come.

At the usual hour, according to their invariable custom, the household assembled for family worship before separating for the night. As already mentioned, the duty of presiding at the simple rite had developed upon Colin since his father's death. But as he rose this evening to take down "the big ha' Bible" from its place, he paused embarrassed, and glanced questioninglly first at his mother, and then at his brother.

"Hamish," he said, "this ought to be your office: will you——"

"No, no, Colin: it's yours," was the reply. "Go on: I wish it." And he pointed to his injured eye.

It would be hard to tell which of the two brothers felt the simple service the more trying. It brought back like an impetuous floodtide all the mournful incidents that had transpired since last that little group, with the addition of one venerable figure who would never more perform the priestly office among them, had united in praise and prayer.

All through that service words committed to memory in his schooldays were repeating themselves in Hamish Munro's mind:

"For not to know a treasure's worth
Till time has stolen away the slighted good,
Is cause of half the poverty we feel,
And makes the world the wilderness it is."

Oh, what would not he have given to be able to undo the past and make restitution to the father whose heart he had broken!

REUNION

The days that succeeded were testing ones for him. The reaction that inevitably follows strong emotion of any sort had set in; and the transition from a life of intense excitement to the calm, uneventful routine of his home could not but prove an ordeal. Could we but lay to heart the solemn fact, that the effects of our past conduct cannot be annulled! The wounds may be healed, but the scars remain.

The necessity of avoiding everything that entailed eyestrain greatly aggravated the painfulness of Hamish's position; for had he been able to read, he would have found solace in such books as had been added to the original collection by Colin. In lieu of that pleasure he was dependent on his mother, who contrived to save some portion of time each day in order to read to him.

It was on one of those occasions that she proposed to entertain him with a new volume she had discovered in a corner of the bookcase. The contents proved interesting, and as she proceeded, Hamish interjected remarks from time to time, testifying his appreciation; and when later the striking of the clock reminded Mrs. Munro of her household duties, and she rose to attend to them, he said:

"That's an original book, mother. He must be a pretty bold man to tackle problems in that way, for he has trodden on the corns of a good many who won't thank him for it."

"Yes, but you haven't asked me the author's name," replied Mrs. Munro.

"No: who is he?" he rejoined.

"Colin Munro."

A start of surprise and a smile of pleasure

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

greeted this announcement, and there was genuine satisfaction in the tones of his voice as Hamish declared:

"Well done, Colin! You've got the better of Sharp after all."

"Oh, I think he'll succeed in getting a hearing," remarked Mrs. Munro. "He says he can now depend on making a living. Of course, you know, he is our breadwinner."

"What a shame it was that he was swindled out of his money by that rascal in London," exclaimed Hamish; then next moment he added sorrowfully: "But O mother, I was a greater fool than he: he lost his by trusting a man who promised fair; I threw mine away with my eyes open."

This reference to that baneful past threw him into a fit of despondency, as every such reference did, and for that reason his mother had scrupulously guarded against any topic that was likely to lead to such a reminder. Yet, despite all precautions, trifles would serve to revive the painful subject.

In such circumstances happiness was precarious, and that first week after their return proved peculiarly trying to each member of the household. It was therefore with glad anticipation that Mrs. Munro awaited her daughter's visit.

More than any of the others, Kitty had resented Hamish's conduct, chiefly on account of the disastrous consequences to her father, whom she really revered. There had been a bitterness in her resentment that made forgiveness difficult. Once assured, however, as she had been by her mother, that it was no sham repentance that had

REUNION

brought her brother back, her generous spirit came to the rescue, and she was prepared to forget the past and hope for the future. Indeed, had any misgivings still lingered in her mind, the spectacle of the once brilliant youth, the admired and courted of all, unable to come to greet her except with the aid of a staff, and that ugly bandage still covering one eye and disfiguring his face — this alone would have disarmed her fears. But more reliable proofs of the profound change he had undergone were soon forthcoming. The barrier that had separated them was broken down. His halting steps had not carried him very far before he was clasped in her arms, and her warm kisses were on his cheek.

From that moment the gloom that had brooded over the household vanished. A new spirit seemed to animate all its members. Mrs. Munro's face lost its troubled look; and even Hamish recovered enough of his former gaiety to bandy quips with his sister, whom he persisted in addressing as "Your ladyship," in spite of her threats of vengeance. Now, released from its barriers, "the course of true love" did "run smooth," bringing with it the peace and tranquillity which such love alone can bestow.

Colin, too, had come into the sunshine, and at the same time into his full share of Kitty's banter. "Our distinguished author" was the designation given him, and frequent were the corresponding remarks.

"All your success," she assured him, "is due to the fact that you made your angelic sister the heroine of your book. No reader could resist her: though, had you done me full justice, and

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

told all you could have told of my charms, you might have triumphed even more. However, you'll make up for it in your next one, for I know you could never find a better model."

Whether Colin was of a similar opinion or not his quiet smile did not attest; but he was certainly gratified that his work was appreciated by those whose approbation he most coveted.

DIPLOMACY REWARDED

CHAPTER XXXIV.

DIPLOMACY REWARDED.

THE days seemed to pass quickly now. Kitty had overcome her elder brother's reluctance to go out. He had become keenly sensitive to his lameness, and shrank from the notice that would be taken of it in the streets. After a first experiment, however, he was able to face the ordeal, and as the weather was mild and bright, a walk in the open air became too great a luxury to be refused.

A morning of peculiar freshness and beauty was irradiating the city and gilding the gray citadel of "modern Athens." The lion on Arthur's Seat appeared to be basking in the sunshine and watching the sparkling waters of the Forth below. Summer's first exquisite flush of green was on the trees; primroses and daffodils were blooming, and birds were singing. That subtle influence in the atmosphere which Spring brings with it—the sense of reviving life—quickened the pulse, making mere existence delightful.

Hamish had received the doctor's sanction to use his eyes for a short time in reading large type, and was thus engaged when his sister came into the room, and insisted that he should come out for a stroll somewhere in so tempting a morning. A glance at the brilliant sunshine outside made assent doubly easy, and in a few minutes they were on their way to the Meadows, where there was no

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

traffic to make their progress difficult: for Hamish was obliged still to wear a shade over his eyes in the sunlight, and his lameness made caution necessary in the streets.

Kitty was in excellent spirits, and with her tall brother leaning on her arm, she guided his steps, making remarks as they went along on all the sights that interested her, which were chiefly personal. When at length, however, they reached the Meadows, her attention was drawn to other objects; for Nature possessed charms for her with which no glories of the city could compete. The beauty of trees and flowers appealed to her, and she expatiated on the prospect before them so animatedly, that her brother raised the shade from his eyes to enjoy it with her.

Children were playing here and there, some of them under the care of nurses, and Kitty's sharp eyes were attracted by one particular group at a little distance. She and her brother had been resting on a bench under some trees, and she now proposed that they should resume their walk, which somehow led in the direction of the aforesaid group.

After advancing a short distance, Kitty stopped suddenly, saying:

"O Hamish, do you know I think I see Joanna Sinclair. Yes, it is. Her pupils are with her. She sees us."

The arm within her own trembled, and a sudden flush suffused her brother's face, as he asked excitedly:

"Kitty, are you sure? Can we not turn back?"

"It's too late now," she replied. "She has seen us: we must go on."

Slowly they approached. The sound of

DIPLOMACY REWARDED

children's merriment was in their ears, and the frequent appeals to Miss Sinclair announced that they were near her presence. But the voices ceased as they came on the scene, and the play-mates stood gazing in surprise at the two intruders, one of whom they had seen before on a recent occasion. Young as they were, they speedily detected the striking change in the face and demeanour of their governess. Pale and agitated, Joanna turned to meet Kitty's affectionate greeting. Hamish held out his hand, which visibly shook. She took it, and the touch brought the blood back in a rush to her cheek.

Woman's tact came to the rescue on this occasion; for, as if nothing in the world had occurred since their last meeting, Kitty calmly informed her friend that Hamish had now nearly recovered his sight, and would soon be able to dispense with her guidance. They had come out that morning, she explained, unable to resist the charm of the weather. She observed that the children too had been allured from their lessons in the schoolroom: or was this their hour of recreation? Would Joanna mind if she went to speak to them for a minute or two? And without waiting for the permission, she joined the young rompers, who gathered round her, delighted with the frolicsome air she assumed, and which at once made her like one of themselves.

There are some moments in our lives which seem charged with the experiences of years. Such were those moments now when the two lovers who had been estranged so completely found themselves once more in each other's presence. Did the recollection of that last meeting on the head-land at Achnacairn, when they separated in bitter-

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

ness and sorrow, overshadow them now? Was Hamish recalling those angry, resentful words that day when he had left her with a cruel, vengeful threat that had pierced her heart like a dagger?

He raised the shade from his eyes, whose mournful, wistful gaze was fixed upon her face, held out his hand—a suppliant hand—and said:

“Joanna, can you forgive me? I cannot forgive myself.”

A sob was her only response, but she clasped that hand, and her tears, like lustral drops, rained down upon it.

“You do forgive me, Joanna?” again came the pleading words.

“Yes, Hamish, I forgive you,” she answered.

“O Joanna,” he cried, “I was mad. I am in my right mind now. God helping me, I’ll atone, as far as that is possible, for all the misery and grief I have caused you and the others. If He spares me, my life will be one of restitution. You’ll help me, Joanna, won’t you?”

“Yes, Hamish: it will be my joy,” was the welcome response.

“And you have been true to me in spite of all you have suffered on my account! O my love!”

“I cannot change to those I have once loved. Have you been true to me, Hamish?”

That look she bent upon him seemed to search his very soul.

“No other woman has ever had my love,” was the earnest avowal. “Your image was always before me—yes, in hours of sore temptation, and it kept me when but for that I might have fallen. I could not bring myself to believe that you had ceased to love me, even though you would not follow me where your conscience forbade. Yes,

DIPLOMACY REWARDED

even in my passion I honoured you for that. And now I can wish for no greater happiness than your forgiveness has brought me. Believe me, my dearest, it will be the supreme aim of my life to make you as happy as you deserve to be; so that you'll forget the sorrowful past. I have so much to make up for—there is my dear mother and Kitty and Colin: I can never make compensation to them for all I have made them suffer; but at least I'll honestly try."

After a thoughtful pause he added:

"I have resolved to seek admission to the service of the Church, if they will accept one so unworthy as I have been. Mother is greatly pleased about it: she says my father's prayers are answered at last."

These words were spoken in solemn, impressive tones that deeply touched the heart of the woman who so truly loved him, and who now realized that she had a guarantee for the purity and sincerity of his attachment that had never been hers in the first days of their acquaintance.

During this momentous interview Kitty had been winning laurels as a playmate with the young Forsyths, whose hilarity increased every moment with her encouragement. When at last, however, she noticed the lovers approaching, and augured from their manner that the meeting had had the desired result, she left the young folks and rejoined them, making a very lame apology for having deserted them, and without any marked symptoms of regret.

The exchange of a few friendly enquiries between herself and Joanna, and the exaction of a promise that the latter would come to visit them very soon brought the interview to a close. Miss

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

Sinclair returned to her charges, and the brother and sister betook themselves homewards.

A radiant smile still played on Hamish's face, and after they had walked a short distance in silence he abruptly turned to his sister and said:

"Kitty, was all this your contrivance?"

"Of course it was," she promptly owned. "I knew Joanna's mind pretty well, and yours too; and what was the use of putting off what I knew would come to pass sooner or later. So, you see, I can play tricks on you yet, and I never had more satisfaction in any I ever did play you than in this one. I hope you're as grateful as you ought to be for the good turn I have done you."

"Well, if it were not for my regard for public decency, your ladyship would have your desert," he answered. "When we're in the privacy of our own dwelling, you'll see what I think of your trickery."

Mrs. Munro did not fail to perceive the altered mien of her son, nor yet the gleeful look of her daughter when they returned from that auspicious morning walk. Her curiosity as to its cause was presently gratified by a few minutes' secret conclave with Kitty, who, however, charged her not to betray any knowledge of the success of her stratagem. Vain injunction! the mother's face was more eloquent than words, and plainly proclaimed the secret before a syllable escaped her lips. For if anything was wanting to complete the joy of her heart at her son's return to home and duty, this welcome tidings supplied it.

After enlightening her mother Kitty entered the lion's den, as she styled Colin's study, where she found him so deeply engaged with something he was writing, that he did not notice her entrance till she said:

DIPLOMACY REWARDED

"I'm truly sorry to bring you down from the clouds, old Diogenes, but I could not keep the news to myself a moment longer. Guess what it is?"

"Judging from your excited state, it must be something extraordinary," said Colin, pushing away his manuscript, and looking up into her face with a quizzical expression.

"Hamish and Joanna are friends again," continued Kitty. "I brought it about this morning. I took Hamish out for a walk to the Meadows at the hour when I knew Joanna and the Forsyths would be there. They met, and now they're reconciled. Aren't you glad, Colin? I knew Joanna had never ceased to care for Hamish, and it's quite clear he is as fond of her as ever. So, you see, 'all's well that ends well'. Now don't look so sober, Diogenes," she added, as no responsive smile stole over his face. "Although you won't be persuaded to fall in love, you can't deny that delightful folly to others."

"Certainly not," he assented quietly. "I wish them happiness with all my heart."

"I knew you would say that, Colin," she replied. "I believe they will be very happy, for Joanna adores Hamish, and he adores her. I could not have chosen a better or sweeter woman for him than Joanna Sinclair."

With these words she left him. Had she looked back, she might have been puzzled to account for his strange behaviour. He rose from his desk, snatched up the loose sheets lying there, tore them into shreds, and pitched them into the fire. Then, leaning against the window, he gazed vacantly out, motionless, as if in a trance, till a sound in the house aroused him; then, as if some vengeful

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

spirit was pursuing him, he strode from the room, seized his cap and rushed out.

As he sped along the street, eager only to reach some place of solitude, two young women whom he encountered laughed in his face; but their derision died, and they cowered under the wrath of an outraged soul that flashed from those blazing eyes as he said:

"When you and I stand before our Maker's judgment-seat, we won't have to answer for the shape of our faces, over which we have no control, but we will have to answer for the shape of our characters over which we *have* control. How will yours meet that test?"

He was out of their sight in another minute, hurrying on till he reached the base of Arthur's Seat. There he sat down and fought a battle with his own spirit such as rarely comes more than once in human experience. It was his hour of darkness. Fierce rebellion against his lot raged within his breast, and it was "an exceeding bitter cry" that burst from his lips as rashly and impiously he asked: "Why hast Thou made me thus? Why hast Thou mocked my soul by shrouding it in a hideous mask? What have I done to be thus denied the joys of life, and to be an alien from my fellowmen?"

It was the tempest, the earthquake, and the fire, before which he stood undaunted and defiant; but there followed that "still, small voice" that calmed the angry waves on Galilee's lake and laid the boisterous wind to rest with: "Peace, be still!" At the sound of that voice he covered his face and sank on his knees. It spoke to his storm-tossed spirit: "He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. What thou knowest

DIPLOMACY REWARDED

not now thou shalt know hereafter." Faith lifted the veil and revealed to him that glorious hereafter, with which "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared;" and in that rapturous moment he entered on that life lived "under the power of the world to come," which was destined to issue in a career of service to God and his fellowmen.

With a chastened spirit he rose from that spot, which was ever afterwards holy ground to him, victorious over himself.

He was able, when he reached home that day, to meet his brother with a smile and say:

"You're a lucky fellow, Hamish. I wish you joy, for I don't think you could have found a greater prize than Joanna Sinclair if you had searched the whole world."

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

CHAPTER XXXV.

VALEDICTORY.

THE bell of the little church had ceased its summons to worship, and within its walls the pews were already filled with a larger congregation than usually assembled there. It was a plain building, like most churches of that period, destitute of any architectural beauty, and indebted solely for its worshippers to the attractions of the pulpit.

Had any stranger entered it on this Sabbath morning, he must have been sensible of the prevalence of some special interest among the congregation, whose eyes were turned with marked intentness toward the door beside the pulpit from which the preacher would presently enter.

At length, preceded by the grey-haired beadle, he appeared, and slowly mounted to the pulpit, the officer waiting at the foot of the steps till he entered it and sat down.

The hush of expectancy was broken, as he rose, by the sound of a peculiarly tuneful voice, when he proceeded to read one of those psalms that pulsate with human feeling as no other words have ever done. In contrast with the beautiful modulations and cadences of that voice the singing of the congregation seemed harsh. And again when it rose in tones of reverential awe and earnest pleading to that ear that is ever open to the cry of genuine entreaty, its accents vibrated

VALEDICTORY

with such emotion as struck a responsive chord in the hearts of the hearers.

A touching simplicity characterised the discourse that followed as he dealt with those solemn words: "No man, having put his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." Possibly some in that audience detected the source of that thrilling earnestness in the preacher's own history; for a public career such as his had been made concealment impossible, and many had come there that evening through sheer curiosity to see one in the pulpit who had been an actor. There were others, however, who had come from a nobler motive: they were those who had often listened to the young minister's father preaching in that same pulpit, and who well remembered his pride and joy in the expectation of seeing his son following in his steps.

What it cost Hamish Munro to preach that sermon they little knew. It was his first act of public restitution for a past that would ever be a bitter memory; and into those heart-searching words he threw the deepest convictions and feelings of a penitent soul, surrendered to its Creator's service.

As the congregation slowly dispersed, many were the comments passed on the discourse and the preacher.

"There was nothing of the stage in that sermon," remarked one. "It's difficult to picture that earnest young man in such a place."

"Did you ever hear such a musical voice?" queried a lady, in fashionable attire. "I never heard the Bible read like that before: it was like a commentary. And that's saying a good deal, for it's the worst-read book of all."

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

"I agree with you," assented her companion; "but it was his earnestness as much as his intelligent reading that made it so powerful. No one could doubt that the man's heart went with his message. Whatever he was before, he's in the right place now."

"Ay, he's where his worthy father hoped to see him," interposed an elderly man. "He would have been a happy man this day, if he had been here."

"Did you happen to notice if his mother and brother were in the church?" questioned another.

"No, they werena there," answered a young woman. "Maister Munro wouldna hae them come; an' I doot his mither wad hae been greetin', like a wheen mair, gin she had h'ard that sermon." And Aillie wiped a lingering tear from her eye as she spoke.

She had kept her purpose of attending the church that day a strict secret, but now she was in haste to announce that she had heard "Maister Munro's first sermon," and to relieve her pent-up feelings in a description of the service, culminating in the verdict:

"The folk were fair dumbfoonert, an' mair than me was greetin'."

What the mother's thoughts and feelings were she herself could never describe, so mingled were they with regret and thankfulness: regret that her husband should have died while his dearest hope seemed shattered, and thankfulness that his desire had been granted at last.

Another year had to elapse before her son's preparation for the ministry was completed, and at its termination he obtained at his own request a humble post as missionary in a poor and neglected

VALEDICTORY

district of Aberdeen, where he laboured for another year, when, to his great surprise and joy, he was invited by the unanimous voice of the congregation to fill his father's pulpit in Edinburgh.

For some weeks previous to his entrance on that work he had resided with his mother, who had found enlarged scope for her skill in domestic arrangements by assisting in the plenishing and decoration of her son's new home. Her labours in this agreeable duty were ably seconded by certain contributions from Lady Forbes, who claimed the right to supervise this important business when she should pay her next visit to Edinburgh, the date of which depended on Joanna Sinclair's decision.

That decision was not long withheld. Joanna had been an outcast from her home for some years now. No approach to a reconciliation had ever been made by her father. The letters which, for her mother's sake, she had addressed to him elicited no response. His sanction, therefore, to her marriage was not sought. Her mother's had been given from the first. There was consequently no reason for delay; and so the wedding-day was fixed.

The parting with her pupils was no small trial to Joanna, between whom and them a close attachment had been formed; and she left them loaded with far handsomer gifts than she deemed suitable for a minister's wife. They invited themselves to attend the marriage ceremony, and the two eldest were elated when she asked them to be her bridesmaids.

Lady Forbes had arrived with more luggage than seemed at all necessary for one person and

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

a short visit. Sir Hector was to arrive next day from London.

The manse had been visited several times, and on each occasion Hamish had observed additional articles, which seemed to have stolen in to their respective nooks unawares, and somehow never seemed out of place. Kitty over-ruled all protests, and imperiously carried out her purposes with remarkably good results, as all acknowledged who saw the house in its final stages of adornment.

One of the last persons to inspect it was Aillie, whose admiration expressed itself in superlatives.

"It's a bonny nest," she commented, addressing its future master: "an' I hope I'll see't weel filled."

In further conversation with her mistress she remarked:

"A' body's gettin' mairried noo. It's Maister Colin's turn next. An' here's Donald Cameron comin' traikin' after me; but I just telt him, I kent whaur I was, but I didna ken whaur I micht be gin I took him."

Mrs. Munro did not speak her thoughts, but they were far-reaching, and she preferred to wait the development of events. The prospect of being one day left alone could not but sadden her, but she would not forecast the future; and Colin had said he would never leave her as long as she lived.

The wedding-day came at length, and once more the little company assembled in the church that had witnessed a similar ceremony not very long ago.

A very sweet bride looked Joanna in her white robes and gossamer veil, which beautified rather than concealed the face beneath it.

An uncle—a brother of her mother, whom she

had met but once or twice in her life—came at his sister's urgent request to give the bride away. That poor lady had been forbidden to attend her daughter's wedding.

The two Miss Forsyths in sumptuous attire attended as bridesmaids, exquisite bouquets in their hands that almost rivalled the bride's, which had been presented by Sir Hector from his own conservatory.

Handsome as ever, but with a look on his face it had not worn in days gone by, Hamish stood awaiting the bride.

As on the former occasion when Kitty had been the bride, three individuals whom it specially concerned found themselves brought together in circumstances fraught with memories of peculiar significance to each. Did Sir Hector Forbes recall his dream of being one day in the place now occupied by Hamish Munro? Or did Kitty picture herself as bridesmaid to Joanna? And one other—Colin: as he officiated as groomsman at his brother's side, was he recalling a dream that had once placed him where his brother was now?

So intricate are the threads that compose the web of life.

Yet all said it was such a happy wedding. The minister's benediction was the prelude to many more invoked on the heads of the newly-married pair, as one after another of the guests made their way toward the central figures with kind words and smiles that made sunshine in their hearts. From those who knew the history of those lovers, now man and wife, the good wishes came with an emphatic tenderness. "The course of true love" in their case had not "run smooth"; but now it had surmounted all the barriers that impeded it

THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE

and turned it awry, and bade fair to flow in a placid stream to the sea that bounds all earthly currents.

And now what remains but to say goodbye? In accordance with a time-honoured practice we have brought the principal personages of the drama to the altar, where, if anywhere, we may expect to leave them happy. And as for the others, their destinies have been so far foreshadowed, that the reader may form a pretty accurate surmise of their ultimate character.

We have had a glimpse of the manse, where the Rev. Hamish Munro and his much loved wife are to share their respective duties, joys, and sorrows, and to "adorn the doctrine" of their profession by deeds framed after the example of the Master they seek to serve.

In another home we have seen the laird and his bewitching lady taking their share in the duties and burdens of life in a different sphere, surrounded by the well earned homage and goodwill of the many they endeavour to befriend.

Nor have we forgotten the widow and her son in their humble home. She does not fear losing him, for she sees that he has wedded literature, and in the dissemination and defence of the ideals by which his own soul is enthralled he finds a satisfaction that has replaced the hope of happiness that once was his. The prosecution of this design has meant the forfeiture of popularity; but to him the message given is sacred; and to uplift and enlighten his fellowmen is the guiding and controlling inspiration of all he writes, and the approbation of his conscience, his reward.

And what of Laird Nabal and his poor wife? Alas, we must take farewell of them under a

VALEDICTORY

cloud. Slowly but surely Dugald Sinclair was discovering that selfishness and unkindness produce their appropriate harvest in the dislike and antagonism of mankind. His wife's sole consolation is the loving epistles that never fail to come from Joanna, who on certain occasions when she pays a visit to her friend, Lady Forbes, has the rare pleasure of meeting her mother under Sir Hector's roof. That indefatigable lady declares that she will yet beard the lion in his den, and, as she succeeded in reconciling a pair of estranged lovers, she is confident of securing as signal a triumph in the case of laird Nabal and his daughter; in which laudable ambition we cordially wish her success.

We know that clouds will gather in the serenest skies; but who would not prefer to bid goodbye to one's friends when the sunshine is around them and smiles are on their faces. Life, we are assured, is "a vale of tears"; but divine hope can throw a rainbow lustre athwart those tears. And in the possession of such a hope we can leave our friends without fear for their future.



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